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OR,

The Man of Two Lives.

The Story of the Ways and Wiles
of a Wicked Set.

BY WM. H. MANNING,
AUTHOR OF "RIVALS OF MONTANA MILL,"
"HOT-HEART, THE SPY," "OLD BALDY,"
ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A MISSING MAN.

NOBODY would have thought of connecting plots and crime with the house which stood in the outskirts of Jersey City over the river from New York City. No one would have supposed that any of its inmates lived in an atmosphere of mystery and intrigue.

As every house carries with it an air which tells some sort of story to an observing eye, so this house seemed to tell of wealth, good taste, luxury, peace and happiness.

The house itself was large and tasteful of exterior, and the grounds in which it stood could not be excelled in point of beauty. The wind-

THAT HE WAS TO BE DROWNED LIKE A DOG DEEP DUKE WELL REALIZED. HE WAS THRUST INTO THE SACK, AND WITH THAT MOVEMENT DISAPPEARED, IT SEEMED CERTAIN, FROM THE EYES OF THE WORLD FOREVER.

ing walks looked neater than the average; the grass greener and the trees more shapely; and many an eye had looked enviously on the place, while passers-by thought that the owner ought to be a happy man.

On a certain afternoon a tall, broad-shouldered man of about thirty years entered the grounds through the front gate, passed to the house and rung the bell. When it was answered by a neat-looking servant girl, he handed her a card with the brief direction that she should take it to her young master.

Being of an inquisitive turn of mind she read the inscription as she went.

"Duke Dorgan!" she murmured. "Why, there's a detective of that name—Deep Duke they call him—and the man below looks just like an officer. I'll bet he is. Now, I wonder what brings him here? It's awful queer, but I'll know why."

She soon returned to the applicant to say that Mr. Philip Woodside would see him, and duly conducted him to the library.

A handsome, frank young man of twenty-five years arose to greet him.

"This is Mr. Dorgan, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, I am Duke Dorgan."

"And I am Philip Woodside, author of the note which doubtless brought you here."

"And surprised me. I hardly expected such a thing, accustomed though I am to deal with people of all grades. I have always had an idea yours was a very peaceful life. I trust there is nothing to worry you seriously."

"Not a thing; not even a dishonest servant. As you say, we are very peaceful, easy-going people. The case upon which you are to work, if at all, does not directly concern me; I am only engaged upon it because I wanted something to occupy my time. Thank fortune, Woodside is not menaced."

"You are fortunate."

"Yes. Well, as to the case. Our minister brought me word of a worthy woman who was in trouble and poor. Would I help her? I caught at the chance. I was longing for something to stir my blood a trifle."

"Am I to work for her?"

"Yes, with me for a paymaster," Philip explained, smiling. "In a word, the woman wants a husband."

"Let her advertise in a matrimonial paper."

"Her want is not in that direction. She is already married, but her husband is mysteriously missing. She has lived in Bangor, Maine, where she became a bride, blushing or otherwise, but has come to Jersey City to find the missing man. That's why you are called into the case."

"To find him?"

"Yes; nothing more."

"Is the woman here?"

"Hardly, but we can reach her in ten minutes. If you can devote your time professionally to the case we will go at once, and I will pay for your services."

Duke Dorgan did not hesitate. It was a chance which promised a good job at least. Probably he would succeed in finding the missing man without much trouble, and Philip Woodside would be likely to reward him handsomely.

The latter put on his hat, and they started to visit the wife minus a husband.

From Philip's further explanation on the way Duke learned that her name was Rose. Her husband had been missing a good many years, and she had given him up as dead when some tidings, believed to be veracious had brought her to Jersey City.

At the end of fifteen minutes the two men reached a small, plain, old-fashioned house. They entered, and were soon in the presence of Mrs. Rose.

She was apparently aged about forty years, and though it was hard to believe she had ever had any special gift of beauty, was now prepossessing in the way which even homely people may be if a good heart leaves its sign upon their faces.

Duke Dorgan was at once in sympathy with this little woman. She looked weak and irresolute of character, but for that very reason was all the more to be pitied.

"Here I am again, Mrs. Rose," exclaimed Philip, cheerfully, "and my visit is a practical one. This is Mr. Dorgan, a professional detective, who will try to find Zachary Rose for you."

The little woman's eyes grew actually startled.

"But I have no money to pay him!"

"I have," Woodside coolly replied. "When I set out to help a person I never do things by halves. Mr. Dorgan knows he is to look to me for pay, and you have only to tell your story. Pray do so without delay, for a detective's time is precious."

Mrs. Rose remonstrated no further. She was only too glad to have this rich young man with the cheerful smile come to her aid, and equally eager to have the mystery of her life explained.

She told her story at some length, but it may be abridged considerably.

Her maiden name had been Eunice Eastman;

her native place was Bangor, Maine. Twenty years before she had married a man named Zachary Rose, and lived with him nearly two years. Then he disappeared, suddenly, completely, mysteriously.

For nearly a score of years she heard nothing from him, and had long believed him dead when news reached her that he had been seen in Jersey City. She came to the place, but all her searching availed nothing. Not a trace could she find of Zachary Rose.

Discouraged and out of money, she finally applied to a clergyman for help, and he in turn recommended her to Philip Woodside.

The latter entered into the case willingly. He was the son of a rich man and time hung heavily on his hands. It pleased his fancy to engage Deep Duke Dorgan to prosecute the search for Rose, and he had a vague idea of helping in the search himself in an amateur way.

People who knew the young man's nature might have prophesied that he would lose all his zeal in twenty-four hours, but just then he was enthusiastic.

He little knew the mischief he was destined to bring about by associating himself with Mrs. Rose's cause!

Duke Dorgan heard the little woman in silence, but his attentive mind stored each item carefully away.

"Who was the man who said that he saw Zachary Rose here?" he asked. "Why didn't he come along to help you rediscover the truant?"

"He is a sailor, sir, and put out from Newburyport, Massachusetts, the day after he wrote me."

"Is he a reliable man?"

"Oh! yes, sir."

"And you are sure he would not stoop to such a low trick as to say he had seen Rose when he had not?"

"He would not do that, sir, I am sure."

"Did he know your husband well, in the old days?"

"Intimately, sir; so he could not be deceived."

"Then we will admit that we have a case. Have you a picture of Mr. Rose?"

"I have one taken twenty years ago," and the woman passed over the article in question. Photography was not so far advanced as an art then as now, but the picture had been well preserved and was in good condition.

Dorgan looked at it attentively. It represented a man not much less than forty years of age, with a bristling beard and a face of more than ordinary intelligence. Indeed, Dorgan would have supposed the original capable of more than a common calling.

"Did you say your husband was a lumberman, madam?" he slowly asked.

"Yes, sir. He worked in the pine woods."

There was another silence, during which the detective attentively studied the picture. As he looked a puzzled expression appeared on his face.

It might be a groundless idea, but it seemed to him that he had somewhere seen the original of that picture. There was something very familiar about every feature, and especially about the broad, high forehead.

His silent, searching scrutiny became so prolonged that Mrs. Rose looked surprised, but Philip had seen something on the street which held his attention, and he paid no heed.

Finally the detective resumed his questions.

"You say your husband was a lumberman? Did he ever work at anything else?"

"Not while I knew him."

"How long was that?"

"Three years."

"Then he was a stranger to you until just before your marriage. Was he also a stranger to Bangor?"

Was it fancy, or did Mrs. Rose look annoyed at the question? She answered quietly, in the affirmative, however.

"You have no idea, I suppose, what business he might adopt here or in New York, over the river, which may be his real place of business?"

"Not unless he worked on the rivers, sir. He was a good boatman, and won quite a reputation while driving logs on the Maine rivers."

"May I keep this photograph, Mrs. Rose?"

"If you will be careful of it."

Dorgan promised, and then arose to leave. Philip went out with him, and both paused on the sidewalk.

"Have you any theory?" the younger man asked.

"Not yet."

"I should like to help you. It is confounded hard work for me to kill time—"

"Why don't you help your father, the professor?" interrupted the detective, with a smile.

Philip shrugged his shoulders.

"Not I! I suppose if poverty fell upon me I could be a plumber, or coal-heaver, but a scientist—never! It's not to my taste. But I fancy I should make an admirable detective, and, if you don't object, I'll join you to-morrow morning. I feel a thrill of self-congratulation at having helped this woman, and if I can only get a little excitement out of it, I shall be a happy man. This monotony is terrible; I want a row—a stir—a rumpus—anything for fun!"

Dorgan laughed and agreed to oblige this rich young man. It might be worth his while, and if no intricate work was to be done, a novice could not well hurt the case.

They separated and the detective walked away alone.

He was in a very thoughtful mood.

"Where have I seen the original of that picture?" he mentally inquired. "I seem to see two faces very much alike—the face of a man now twenty years older than when the picture was taken. Who is he?"

Earnestly he applied his mind to a solution of the question, but without result. He could not place the counterpart of the picture. The resemblance, however, gave him an interest in the case he seldom felt in one which seemed so trivial.

Trivial! Such was the word he used, little suspecting that he had entered upon the most perplexing case of his life.

CHAPTER II.

A MATE TO THE PICTURE.

It is no easy task to find a certain person in Jersey City, for not only is the place a large one, but it is practically a part of New York and Brooklyn. Here are three cities in a line, the combined population of which is not far from two millions. It is no child's play to find a missing man in such a multitude, especially one who has been absent a score of years. Deep Duke went about the work quietly and systematically. Long experience had made the bare outline of official duty a mechanical task. His first act was to set the machinery of law in motion. All this was simple; if the case proved intricate, he would have to depart from the beaten path and show individual skill.

All that afternoon he was haunted by the feeling that he had some time, and somewhere, seen the original of the picture which was in his pocket, but, meditate as he would, he could not remember anything definite.

Again and again he went over the past, calling to mind men he had known and seen. None of them was like Zachary Rose. He had seen many persons in humble life, and of the order to which the missing man might belong—pilots, deck-hands, longshoremen and the like—but when he called them to mind, the desired face did not appear.

It was singular how his impression haunted him, and how the truth evaded him. This annoyed, yet made him all the more zealous.

"I am going to find Zachary Rose," he declared, again and again, to himself; and he was noted for being as obstinate as he was skillful, secret in his methods and chary of speech.

By night he had formed a plan for the following day, and as he remembered Philip Woodside's request that he might be allowed to join in the search, he saw the need of notifying him.

Accordingly, he walked over to the mansion. When he reached the grounds the first shadows of twilight were falling, but the oasis of shrubbery, grass and trees looked wonderfully cool and pleasant. Duke looked admiringly about.

As he did so a lady and gentleman passed along an intersecting path with slow steps and gay conversation. They glanced at him—no more. Another moment and he was doubtless forgotten.

The detective knew that the lady was Claudia Woodside, sister of Philip, and mistress of Woodside House. He knew, too, that she was young and charming, but he fancied there was a suggestion of disdain in the glance she cast toward him. He may have misconstrued her.

Her companion was a young man two or three years her senior, and though he was a stranger to Dorgan, the latter at once placed him as a member of the aristocratic class. Claudia Woodside's companions were not likely to be anything less; although Professor Woodside never went into "society," his wealth and position easily placed his children among the select and elect of the city.

Duke Dorgan's brief view of the stranger's face did not impress him favorably.

"He has a 'sharkish' look," he thought.

This, however, was nothing which concerned him, and he went on into the house.

He was at once ushered into the presence of the heir of Woodside, whom he found in the professor's study. The latter had only just returned, and was giving his son directions about some trifling affair. The detective was allowed to interrupt them, because it was supposed that his visit would be short, and the master of the house was no disciple of exact ceremony.

Philip introduced the other men, and then all sat down.

Owing to the partial darkness of the room, Dorgan could see but little of the professor, but this was immaterial. He already knew him by sight, and did not expect business relations with him.

"Well," said Philip, promptly, "what news?"

"None, as yet."

"Not a trace of the man?"

"No; it was not to be expected so soon. He has had twenty years to hide, and five hours is not sufficient time to find him. I came, however, to say that I am going to Brooklyn to pursue my search to-morrow, and if you are really

in earnest about helping me, you will have to meet me at the ferry at a comparatively early hour."

"I am in earnest. What is to be the hour?"

"Eight o'clock."

"I'll be there."

"Allow me to inquire the meaning of your conversation," said the professor, politely.

"I am about to become a detective, under Mr. Dorgan's teaching; or, to speak more definitely, my aid has been requested in behalf of a poor woman who seeks a runaway husband, and for the pleasure and excitement of the thing I am going to help Dorgan."

"Nonsense!" said the professor, somewhat curtly.

"Don't you approve of it?"

"What do you care about the case?"

"Oh! it's a matter of charity and excitement."

"A woman seeks a runaway husband, you say?"

"Yes, sir; nothing else."

"Why did he run away?"

"I don't know; even the deserted wife don't know."

"You mean, she says she don't know. I don't approve of your mixing yourself up with such a case. Men don't run away for nothing, and deserted wives can usually tell more than the world knows. There is an unpleasant flavor about all domestic discords—better keep your skirts clear of this case, Philip, as it is nothing whatever to you."

"What harm can it do?"

"It may do a good deal."

"How can it? The deserted wife is one of the meekest of women; were you to see her, even you would not doubt."

"Thank you," the professor hastily replied, "I don't care to see her. If you want such associates, mix with them. I must decline."

He spoke irritably, and at the same time showed a desire to drop the subject. Philip did not object. He thought himself old enough to have his own way and intended to do so, so the discussion need not be prolonged. He was, however, somewhat surprised that his father, usually charitably inclined, was so averse to helping in the present case.

The professor abruptly arose and lit the gas. As the light flashed up it fell full upon a picture which hung upon the wall nearly opposite to Duke.

It was a portrait which indicated the hand of a skillful artist, and seemed to stand out and invite attention from the quick sighted detective. It had only to present its claim to hold him captive.

Only his schooled self-possession saved him from a tell-tale start as he saw the painting. He had made a discovery which startled him!

The picture was almost an exact likeness of the photograph in his pocket—the photograph of Zachary Rose!

It was well for him that, after disposing of the remnant of his match, the professor again spoke to his son and their attention to each other prevented them from noticing Dorgan; so Duke had all the chance he wanted to look at the picture on the wall.

He could not persuade himself that he was mistaken; the picture was there to destroy all his theories to the contrary, and each moment he saw the resemblance grow stronger. Forehead, eyes, nose, hair and beard—in every way the two "shadows" were very much alike. He believed they represented one and the same man.

But how came a portrait of Zachary Rose in Woodside House?

Greatly puzzled, but calm outwardly, Dorgan finally turned away from the picture. He could not hope to stare at it longer without attracting attention. As he turned Professor Woodside suddenly made a similar movement, and the two faced each other.

"Do you find your calling a pleasant one, Mr. Dorgan?" asked the professor, politely.

"I hardly know."

It was a vague answer, but the wonder was that the detective was able to reply at all. As he faced the man of science he made another discovery. Looking at Mr. Woodside he knew where he had seen the face for which he had been vainly hunting ever since he visited Mrs. Rose.

That face which was impressed upon his mind like something seen through a veil, and which was like that of the picture, was Professor Archibald Woodside's!

It was a startling discovery, but, after a moment, the detective was ready to laugh at it. Resemblances were likely to occur in all cases, and Mr. Zachary Rose might have been a counterpart of George Washington. Of course it amounted to nothing that Professor Woodside resembled him.

But the picture! Resemblances might be explained away, but the fact that a picture of Zachary Rose hung in the Woodside house was certainly singular.

Deep Duke had too perfect self-control to betray his wonder, and he talked easily with the professor. There were many strange things in the room, scientific and otherwise, and the detective referred to them with a definite object in view.

Finally he carelessly referred to the portrait. The professor smiled.

"A likeness of myself as I was a score or more years ago," he said, frankly. "I had it painted to oblige my wife, who was then living. I wore a full beard at that time, you see, and it is not much like what I am now."

Duke did not mention the photograph in his pocket, nor did he see fit to say anything unpleasant then. He could not very well associate Professor Woodside with Zachary Rose, but he did wonder how Mrs. Rose obtained the professor's picture, and why she asserted that it was her husband's.

Philip had been smoking his cigar in sullen silence. He had been too indolent to look at the photograph when Mrs. Rose exhibited it, but he now resented his father's position in the case.

He had been accustomed to obey him in a general way, despite the fact that he was long since his own master, and did not like to offend him now. As Duke arose, young Woodside again spoke:

"So you really object to my going with Mr. Dorgan?"

"My dear Philip, you are your own judge, and can do as you see fit. Still, I don't approve of your associating yourself intimately with this case. Pay whatever Mr. Dorgan charges, if you will, but let him do the work and deal with the woman. My observation leads me to believe no husband deserts a wife without good reason. Be sure you don't bestow your sympathy on an unworthy woman!"

With these words the professor bowed to the detective and withdrew from the room. Philip looked after him in surprise.

"Well, this is rather odd. I neither understand his emphasis nor his objection to letting me help you. One would think he had a spite against our *protegee*—but, now I think of it, her name was not mentioned at all."

"No. It seems that your father don't like deserted wives."

"Don't know why he should be opposed to them, for none ever did him harm. On the whole, Dorgan, I'll forego the morning trip with you, but I'm not going to let any groundless prejudice cheat me out of possible fun and adventure. I'll see you again."

The detective understood that Philip had no more to say, so he quietly arose to take his departure. As he did so the eyes of the portrait seemed to meet his own, and he could almost fancy the professor asserting his antipathy to deserted wives. It was a singular coincidence that a picture so like Zachary Rose, and so like Archibald Woodside, hung upon the wall. It was very singular!

CHAPTER III.

A STARTLING ACCUSATION.

DUKE DORGAN left the house and started down the street. Darkness had fully descended upon the city, but the detective thought nothing about this. He walked on in deep thought, heedless of all about him.

He was still wrestling with the riddle which had so suddenly been presented to his notice. The case which he had thought so simple had assumed a new aspect since he went to Woodside House. It was simple no longer; if the idea had not been so wild he would have thought that he could at any moment place his hand upon runaway Zachary Rose.

The matter of the pictures puzzled him greatly. It seemed absurd to suppose that Professor Woodside could be Rose, or know anything about that person, yet only his eminent position saved him from suspicion.

Duke knew his reputation well.

All scientific men knew the professor, and knew him as one of the most zealous of their craft. He had no taste for business, and, though the father of two intelligent children, often seemed to forget them entirely in his devotion to science. In his work he was patient, but in the ordinary affairs of life was often irritable and impatient.

Add to this the fact that he was universally supposed to be the most honest of men, and the picture is complete as the world knew Archibald Woodside.

"I suppose there is some natural way of explaining the matter of the pictures," mused the detective, "and I must get at it. I want time, though; Philip is my employer, and I must not rashly offend him. All can be logically explained, no doubt."

By this time Duke had reached a small, narrow street which led from the one he was traveling. It was a shorter course, and he turned into it.

He was too deeply absorbed in thought to notice how poorly it was lighted, or to care for the fact. Neither did he notice that a second man was moving quickly, almost silently after him.

At that moment he had no more reason than an ordinary citizen to suppose any one would molest him, or he might have noticed the light-footed man who glided after him.

The latter was evidently one who needed watching. All his attention was fixed upon Dorgan, and his eyes gleamed with excitement. He had been delighted when he saw the detec-

tive enter the narrow, almost-deserted street, and he now pressed forward to overtake him.

Quickly and carefully he glided up to Dorgan, and then his left arm was thrown around the detective's neck.

That rude grasp was Duke's first warning, and though he made an immediate movement to release himself, his head was drawn back in such a way as to render him almost helpless. Another moment and a hand slipped into his pocket.

It might have been the work of an ordinary robber, but, even then, he remembered that the picture of Zachary Rose was in that pocket! Already the hand had clasped over it!

This directness might mean nothing unusual, but it flashed upon Duke Dorgan that it did. As the hand and the picture came out, his own hand closed upon the picture.

The unknown uttered an oath, and clutched the detective's throat. The latter flung around his foot, tripping his enemy cleverly, but lost his own balance and fell. Both men went down together, but the unknown had the best chance and partially saved himself.

He was up in a moment and running away.

Duke was but a trifle behind him, but as he made an effort to dash away in pursuit another hand seized him. He turned and saw a policeman.

"Hold on!" commanded the latter. "I reckon I've got you!"

"Let me go!" said Duke, fiercely.

"I guess not, my bold outlaw."

"Confound your thick head, I am a detective. That man is a thief. Let me—"

"Oh! yes; let you get away! I guess not. I'm not so green as that. You're no detective."

Dorgan was not usually at a loss for decisive action and decisive words, and was not long in satisfying the patrolman that he had made a serious mistake.

And a serious one it indeed was, for delay had enabled the unknown to make good his escape, and all Duke's efforts to find him proved fruitless. He had gone and left but one sign.

In the detective's hand was *one-half* of a photograph—that of Zachary Rose. When the two men fell both had clung to the picture, and as a result, it had been cleanly torn in two. The part left to Duke showed merely the shoulders and breast of the missing Mr. Rose; the late assailant had the half which bore the shadow of the lumberman's face!

Deep Duke was angry, but he wasted no words. He was well aware that action counted for far more than idle talk. He would have given a good deal just then to know to whom he owed the late attack, however.

Absurd as it seemed at first thought, he could not avoid the belief that the photograph was responsible for the whole affair.

Whoever the man had been, he had made a prompt effort to secure the picture, and, once secured, had beat a retreat without molesting anything else. And the detective's watch was within easy reach.

Dorgan found his perplexity increased. Recent events were not in harmony with the "simple" case he had undertaken. One would suppose that instead of finding a humble old man, he had agreed to stir up a gang of desperate law-breakers.

"But I feel sure that picture was the sole object of this assault," he thought, "and I am going to know more about it. I have not yet properly gauged this case, but I begin to see that there is a good deal in it, and I'm going to solve the riddle. Another thing, they won't find me off my guard again. I say 'they,' for I feel sure that there is more to this affair than I have before dreamed of."

He made another turn about the place, but, failing to get sight of the unknown, abandoned the effort and started homeward.

In the mean while, what of the unknown?

He had escaped observation by a device which seemed as extemporaneous as it was bold, but which might prove not devoid of method. When he turned into the main street he did not go far before he paused, placed one hand on a fence and leaped into the grounds of a fine house by the way.

It was the property of Professor Woodside, but unmindful of the fact that he was trespassing on sacred soil, the unknown continued his way until he was well concealed by the shrubbery.

Then he paused, chuckled and carefully put away the half-photograph he had secured.

"It was a bold step," he muttered, "but it had to be done. I've crippled that confounded Duke Dorgan right at the start, and mine shall be the hand to bridle and guide our gracious professor. Deep Duke is not deep enough for this case."

He looked up at the window of the scientist's study and smiled contentedly.

"A land of promise," he added, "and I'm a fool if I don't make the honey flow."

Who was this man, and what the meaning of his exultant and gloating manner?

Footsteps sounded on the walk, and he shrunk back in the shrubbery and waited and watched. Two persons came slowly along toward him, and he smiled again. He knew them well. Duke

Dorgan had seen them earlier in the evening; they were Claudia Woodside and the young man of aristocratic appearance.

They paused near the street robber's ambush. "Are you going in now?" asked Miss Woodside.

"I think not. I remember that I have a cigar in my pocket, and such things will make a man forget even bright eyes temporarily."

"You are very complimentary."

"You brought my remark to an untimely end. I had something very good to say, but now I've forgotten it."

"I will forgive you; more, I will willingly leave you to your cigar. You can join us anon."

As she spoke the last words she moved toward the house, and her companion proceeded to light a cigar with great satisfaction. He had just thrown away his match and puffed the cigar to a glowing coal when some one else stepped into his view and stood looking at him in cool silence.

The man with the cigar returned the gaze. Dark as it was he knew he was looking at neither the professor nor Philip, and he thought the intruder's manner insolent.

"Well," he said, curtly, "what do you want?"

"I want to see Mr. Horace Wilberson."

"I am he."

"I know it."

"Well, who the dickens are you?"

"Prosperity must have injured your eyesight. Time was when you knew Levi Peters well enough."

Two words fell from Wilberson's lips—two angry, profane words—but Peters smiled calmly.

"You don't rush to my arms, Horace."

"No, I don't."

"Possibly you know of arms to which you would gladly rush—fair, womanly arms. Horace, I congratulate you. You are installed at Woodside House, and the fair Claudia seems to have given you her heart, or a portion—"

"I must request you not to mention her name," tartly interrupted Wilberson.

"No? Time was when you were not so fastidious. Do you remember our compact? You offered me a thousand dollars if I would help you win her."

"It was an infamous bargain, Peters."

"Indeed? When did the devil turn saint? Just because you have got the *entree* of Woodside, and think that you have a sure thing, you see fit to throw over old friends and old bargains."

"I was a villain to ever scheme for—for—"

"Claudia," coolly supplied Peters.

"Yes. I was a villain, and I see it now. But you wrong me when you interpret my motives as you did. I do not throw you over, while as to my conduct, a man may reform, may he not?"

"Some men may," was the coolly sarcastic reply, "but not Horace Wilberson."

"Confound it! you are severe."

"What about the thousand dollars you promised me, my friend?"

"I haven't it."

"But will have when you marry the heiress."

"Peters," said the younger man, earnestly, "don't press me on this point. I am your friend, and—"

"You are my 'friend' simply because you are afraid of me. Now that you are on good terms with Lord Woodside and family, you would turn saint and throw me over—if you dared! But, you don't dare; you shall not. Listen to me, Wilberson. I want a good, cool ten thousand out of the Woodside hoard."

"Never!" exclaimed the younger man. "I will not give you—"

"Nobody said you would. I request it of you. If you refuse, I shall go to the charming Claudia."

"Scoundrel!"

"Fair words, if you please. I am not in the good graces of an heiress, but I can bend that heiress and all her tribe to my will as the wind does the feeble bush."

"This is rank nonsense."

"I don't know of a bigger fool than he who sits in judgment on his neighbor's words. Let me illustrate. What do you know about your high and mighty professor? How far back can you trace his career? You know only the Woodside of to-day, but I could open your eyes if I would. I will, too. My dear Horace, if you marry Claudia you will wed a murderer's daughter!"

Wilberson impatiently threw off the hand which had been placed upon his shoulder.

"Do you think me a fool?"

"No, but, like myself you are a villain. Drop the goody-goody dodge, and let us bleed the Woodsides together. Come, what do you say?"

"I decline."

"Carefully!"

"I repeat it—I decline! Your trick is altogether too transparent. You might better slander any one else than Professor Woodside. He is above reproach."

"He is a criminal, and I can place him in prison within an hour. I swear it!"

"Then you swear to a lie!"

Levi Peters recoiled as the words were hurled at him in a new voice, and something like consternation fell upon him as he saw Claudia Woodside towering before him like a tragedy queen! Never had coming been more untimely, but if he was rendered speechless, such was not the case with her.

"You infamous wretch!" she cried, "you have uttered the vilest of falsehoods, but you shall answer to me!"

CHAPTER IV.

SEEKING A SECRET.

It had been a startling surprise for both men. They had supposed themselves safe from observers or listeners, and Claudia Woodside's appearance was enough to dismay any one after such a conversation. She had heard serious charges against her father, and resented them with her usual spirit, and there seemed absolutely no way to smooth the matter over.

Horace Wilberson was especially startled. His companion had analyzed him very correctly. He had more regard for himself than for honor. He was of a weak nature; too weak to buffet fate boldly, and too weak to stick to honor when he could better his prospects by resorting to dishonorable means.

Now, after long, careful efforts to win Claudia, he found the whole structure reeling about him, and he felt despair.

Levi Peters had an older, cooler head. He had made serious charges against the professor, but it was not likely Claudia had heard the worst; she would be above eavesdropping.

He quickly rallied and prepared to fight his way out of the difficulty. It must be done, even though he temporarily placed himself in a humiliating position.

"Beg pardon, miss," he said, with a mixture of politeness and surliness more common to those of lower social rank than his, "but what's all this row about?"

"I am Professor Woodside's daughter."

"The blazes you are!" exclaimed Peters, simulating surprise.

"I am, and I want to know what you mean by such language as I have overheard?"

"If you overheard anything you must have acted the eavesdropper."

"It is false!" Claudia cried, scornfully. "Do you suppose I would listen to such as you if I could help it? It was not my fault that, as I approached, I heard you say my father was a criminal and that you could place him in prison. You know that was false. This gentleman spoke the truth when he told you that Professor Woodside was above reproach. What dare you charge against him? Explain yourself. What is your charge?"

She spoke imperiously, as though he was unworthy of a word from her, but Peters did not resent it. He smiled secretly, for he knew the storm could be averted.

"This man would not give me a dollar," he grumbled.

"And you took revenge by slandering my father?"

"I meant no harm."

Peters assumed a hang-dog, sulky air, and at the same time gave Wilberson a sly kick to stir his wits. The latter took the hint.

"You are liable to harm by letting your tongue run so freely—harm to yourself!" he retorted. "Now, my man, I will give you no money after this, and you are not wanted in these grounds. It is a private place. Will you move on at once?"

He had fallen into line just as Peters wished, and the latter pretended to obey sulkily and shambled off. The darkness prevented Claudia from seeing that he was well-dressed, and she supposed him a mere tramp. It would hardly be dignified to waste words on such a fellow and she saw him go willingly.

"An evil person," commented Wilberson. "I will follow and see that he really leaves the grounds."

He dared not do otherwise; he wanted to speak with the intruder and close his mouth. It would not do to let him talk; he could oust Mr. Horace Wilberson from his enviable position at Woodside by a word.

Peters paused at the gate.

"I helped you out of that fix," he said.

"You got me into it."

"Wrong. You should not have quarreled with me."

"What do you mean to do now?"

Peters laughed lightly.

"I mean to win. It is for you to say whether you will be in the game or out of it."

"I must have a long talk with you. I have no idea what you are driving at, but this is no time to explain. Where can I see you?"

Peters gave an address, and a time was set for an interview. Then he went back to Claudia, after a few words from his more astute companion as to how he could best allay any suspicions the girl might still have.

The intruder did not delay longer, but hurried away down the street. He did not court scrutiny in the light of the street-lamps. He has passed as a mere tramp with Miss Woodside.

Were he to be plainly seen this idea would fade away. He was as well-dressed and polished looking as Wilberson himself.

He had not done any good by seeing Horace, but he found some comfort in reflecting on the ready wit by which he had deceived Miss Woodside, so he walked away in good spirits.

Luck now turned against him. His delay in the grounds corresponded with the time Duke Dorgan had devoted to searching for him, and it came to pass that, as the detective started homeward, a figure suddenly crossed the line of his vision which he recognized at once.

It was the man who had robbed him of one-half of Zachary Rose's picture!

Dorgan at once became the alert detective. He had longed to see this man again; he saw him now. His first impulse was to hurry forward and seize him, but this plan was quickly discarded.

Plainly, the thief had not seen him, and the quickest way of learning more about him was to follow where he went. So Duke crossed the street to the other sidewalk, and from that moment Peters had a keen, patient foe on his track—the Silent Sleuth was abroad!

The rogue did not suspect it. His encounter with the detective had been almost forgotten in the pressure of other matters. He looked at his watch, and then hurried on along several streets.

Where he went the sleuth followed.

In this way the detective was led to the lower part of the city, and to a locality far less respectable than that from which they started. In fact, to the lowest part of the city in a moral and social sense.

Finally Peters turned and abruptly disappeared. A few steps showed Duke that he had gone into an alley which led between two old, wooden houses, and he promptly followed. Thus he was led to a court, upon which fronted several more wooden houses.

It was not an inviting-looking place. It might be honest, but was not clean.

Deep Duke, however, thought mostly of the man he was following, and he kept his gaze sharply fixed upon him. Peters walked straight across the court, and entered one of the houses without ringing or knocking.

The detective glanced sharply around. Several men, women and children were lounging on the steps of some of the houses, but none at that particular one. He followed his man as boldly as though he lived there, and walked into the house as he had seen his predecessor do.

He was in a hall poorly-lighted by a kerosene lamp. No one was near at hand, but he could see a pair of legs just disappearing at the top of the stairs.

He coolly ascended after the legs. They might not belong to his man, but he believed they did.

Before he reached the top he heard two men greet each other. No one was visible, but he quickly observed a few facts. Two doors, each of a different room, opened into the hall. These doors were now open. In the front room were the two men, busily talking, and there, too, was a light. There was none in the rear room, but a broad band of light fell upon the poorly-carpeted floor. From this the detective argued that the rooms were connected, and he believed that a desired opportunity was before him.

Quickly the sleuth glided into the second room.

As he had thought it connected with the front room, and he moved to the most desirable point.

Conversation continued, and two men were to be seen seated at a table. One was the person Deep Duke had followed—he recognized the form, the face being invisible. The second man, a burly, brutal-looking fellow, abruptly rose and closed the door which led to the hall.

"Now talk on," he said, refilling two glasses with beer.

"You know why I've come," observed Peters.

"Ef I do, I also hope you've got a boodle in yer pocket."

"I regret to say that I have not."

"No pay, no talk," declared the big man.

"I will raise it, though."

"When you do, I'll talk."

"Come now, don't speak that way. Can't you trust me? You shall have all your news in worth."

"Promises won't fill the growler nor buy the weed. Uncle Sam's notes will."

"See here, Abe," Peters impatiently said, "I hope you are not going to be severe. I tried to raise money to-night, but my man kicked and some one else jumped into the arena and spoiled the game. It's a sure thing, though, and I make this offer; I'll give you a ten now, and the balance within two days."

"Le's see the X."

Peters drew out a crisp bank-note, and Abe looked at it greedily.

"It's good fur two hundred beers," he said, musingly. "A bird in the hand— Pass it over, old man, I'll talk."

Peters obeyed, and his disreputable-looking companion stowed the paper carefully away in his ragged vest.

"Now for your story," continued the visitor.

"What do you want ter know?"
"All about the man we spoke of being in prison."

Abe filled his glass again, emptied it in the way most pleasing to himself, and after a provoking pause, spoke in a slow, deliberate voice: "This 'ere world is full o' ups an' downs, an' the best o' gents gits down on their luck now an' then. I do. I did this once come twenty year ago, when I was a youngster o' eighteen. I brung up in State Prison."

"I've always been a popular man, an' I made frien's among them I was with. One man in perticular I soon got chummy with. He was a good bit older than me, bein' nigh forty, but he had the fresh heart o' a man who does his duty an' has an easy conscience."

"He was in fur stealin' a hoss, but had been thar afore me, an' his time was up ahead o' mine. When it was up, he went out inter ther world a free man. Next day the most funniest thing happened!"

The speaker broke off and laughed heartily. "What was it?" Peters eagerly asked.

"Why, two detectives showed up at the prison, an' sez they: 'We hev come fur So-an'-so, convict. He's wanted fur murder. We understand he's in here fur hoss-stealin'."

"I understand he ain't," sez the warden. "You are jest one day too late. Yesterday that chap's time was up, an' he walked out o' here a free man."

"Yes, sir, they was jest one day too late. My pal had slipped his collar an' kicked out o' the shafts jest in time. Hang me ef it wa'n't rich!"

Here Abe laughed heartily again, but to Duke Dorgan, at least, his mirth seemed forced.

"What was his name?" Peters eagerly asked. A crafty gleam appeared in Abe's eyes.

"That's the part o' my story that brings a higher price. Bring me all the lucre you agreed, an' it shall be told."

"Was it Zachary Rose?"

"No."

"Archibald Woodside?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Oh, come off! Didn't I say this part must wait?"

"But I am anxious to know now."

"My terms are cash."

Peters uttered a subdued curse. He knew this disreputable man of old; knew his sullen, obstinate nature, and felt sure that argument would be thrown away upon him. He sat looking irritably at him, while the watching sleuth almost held his breath to listen. The detective felt repaid for coming. He had heard two names mentioned in a startling way. What did Peters mean by associating them with the old-time convict?

He intended to know before leaving the house. Whatever might be the facts of the case, affairs had taken such a turn that he intended to confront, perhaps arrest, these men who seemed to know so much.

"Was this in the Maine State Prison?" Peters asked, after a pause.

"Don't you wish I would tell, and so let you onto the secret?" mocked Abe.

"I can easily learn now. I have only to make inquiries and learn at what prison a convict was thus wanted just after he was released."

"O' course you kin easily find out after twenty years o' time."

Peter's face assumed a disappointed, angry look. It was not at all likely that he could find a record to guide him, and the old prison officials were probably gone, or had forgotten all about the affair.

"Don't git riled up. You kin have the news when you bring the money," Abe added.

"But I want it now."

"Sorry."

"Confound you! you think you have all the winning cards, but this I will say—I'll wager something I can name your convict, now a fine gentleman, and place my hands on him in an hour."

CHAPTER V.

A STEP WHICH MAY CAUSE TROUBLE.

ABE set down the beer-glass he had raised half-way to his mouth, and looked at his companion in surliness. Then his coarse face suddenly cleared.

"You're bluffing!" he exclaimed.

"Am I?" Peters airily retorted. "I'll show you."

And then Duke Dorgan saw him take from his pocket the half-picture he had so lawlessly obtained. Thrusting it out toward Abe he coolly added:

"How does that size up for your convict?"

Abe fixed his attention on the picture, and both Peters and Dorgan watched him eagerly. Would he recognize it? If he did he gave no sign; if the picture was familiar he showed unexpected self-control.

"What's all this?" he demanded. "What rag-bag hev you ben robbin'? Whar's the rat that chewed this?"

"It's the picture of your convict."

"Not much, it ain't! Don't look no more like

him than it does like Adam. W'at d'ye mean by chuckin' sech trumpery as this at me?"

"Do you assert that I am wrong?"

"Rather!"

"And this don't look like your convict?"

"Not a bit."

"Abe Benlow, I believe you lie!"

"That's all right," returned Abe, with a grin. "You may think w'at you like, but don't bring me no more o' your dog-eared pictur's here."

W'at Egyptian mummy does this represent? Whar did ye ketch him?"

"Come, no nonsense, Abe. I'll make it worth your while to give me the facts now. Will you do it, if I will double your rate of pay?"

"No, I won't. Cash in advance is my terms, an' I won't deviate a hair. Biz is biz, an' you can't expect me ter throw away a good thing, Mr. Levi Peters."

Without another word the visitor put away the torn picture and then arose.

"Can I see you here to-morrow night?" he asked.

"Yes, ef you comes fer business."

"Well, I propose to come and bring the money in full. Will you then tell all you know?"

"Every word, ef the cash is in hand."

"You may expect me, then."

Peters did not speak in a very amiable mood. He could have throttled Abe Benlow—if he had possessed the muscular power—with hearty good will, but the circumstances of the case made it necessary for him to go slowly. Until the disreputable man's secret was learned it would not do to anger him, and he preferred to depart in peace.

So did the sleuth. His idea of confronting these men and demanding an explanation had yielded to another plan. They were to meet the following night, and Benlow was to tell his story! If the detective could then overhear it, he would easily learn the secret. If, on the contrary, he revealed himself at once, he was likely to find Abe less communicative than ever.

He had read the fellow's disposition well, and governed himself accordingly.

He decided to wait and attempt to learn the secret by other means. Now that he knew the names of both these men, the chances were that he would lose nothing by delay if he could leave the house undetected.

Deciding that it would be well to get out ahead of Peters, he at once glided into the hall and, finding the way clear, went on briskly. He was soon in the court, and from there passed on to the street.

Not long had he to wait for Peters. The man came out and started away.

Deep Duke could then have regained the torn picture, but did not see fit to try. He was anxious that Peters should remain unsuspecting that Nemesis was on his track. It would be well to let the picture go for a time—well to give the man all the rope he wanted.

At the end of ten minutes Peters paused before a house of respectable appearance, produced a latch-key and entered with the air of one at home. Duke knew he had "hived" him, and wasted no more time on him.

The hour was growing late, and the detective started for his own quarters. As he went every thought was of the case now in hand. It had grown marvelously since he began upon it. Then it had seemed the most simple of cases; now it was intensely intricate and puzzling.

Who was Zachary Rose?

Why did his picture and that of Archibald Woodside so closely resemble each other?

What had Levi Peters to do with the case, and who was the convict whom he seemed determined to connect with Zachary Rose?

Wholly occupied with these perplexing questions, Dorgan walked on like one in a dream until near his own home. A sudden recollection that by making a slight *detour* he could pass Woodside House led him to turn in that direction.

He did not expect any great result; it was but the satisfaction of an idle whim.

As he neared the house he saw that it was, so far as he could see, dark from top to bottom. Probably all the family were asleep and unsuspecting of the strange experience he was having.

Suddenly he noticed something more. A man was standing by the gate, looking earnestly toward the house. Duke paused and stood in the shadow of a tree. The man by the gate turned his head and looked up and down the street.

The detective had become interested. The manner of the unknown was suspicious, and he seemed to be afraid of being seen.

"He acts like a burglar," Duke thought. "Perhaps he has been posted by a gang who are raiding the house. I must know more of him."

Just then a step sounded on the carriage-way, and these suspicions were confirmed. The unknown opened the gate, and a second person came out, but it was no burglar laden with the spoils of a robbery.

It was a woman!

That she was not a confederate of robbers was not at first apparent, but a new aspect was given the affair as the man took her tenderly in his arms and imprinted a kiss on her lips. Duke Dorgan whistled softly. The affair was growing decidedly romantic.

"Some servant come out to meet her Romeo," the detective thought.

Whoever it was, there was not much tarrying by the gate. This was softly closed, and then the couple moved briskly along the street.

The sleuth walked after them, quietly smiling. His expressed opinion had not changed, but a new discovery was in store for him. When they had gone a hundred yards they reached a cab which stood by the curbstone. Here they paused, entered, and the cab rolled away.

The detective again uttered a low whistle. He was more surprised than ever. Servants and their lovers are not in the habit of going to ride in cabs; this discovery changed the whole appearance of the case.

Who were these persons for whom a cab had been waiting, and what were they about to do?

It looked as though Duke would not be able to solve the question, but as he stood looking after the vehicle, the sound of wheels behind him caused him to suddenly look around. A second cab was approaching.

His resolution was taken in a moment, and as it came nearer he hailed the driver, found it vacant, engaged it and was soon rolling along after the first vehicle.

He did not know that he had any especial interest in the matter, but he wished to know whether he had or not. A somewhat lengthy drive proved to be ahead of him, and it was not until the opposite extremity of the city was reached that any halt was made.

Then the foremost cab paused.

Duke Dorgan looked on in wonder. The stop had been made at the door of a church, and, even as he looked, the pursued couple alighted from their vehicle. He glanced at the church. Although later than the hour at which evening meetings usually close, lights still burned within.

A sudden suspicion occurred to the detective. He could find but one explanation of this strangely-timed visit.

Another moment and the passengers of the other cab were hurrying up the church steps. They passed through the door, and the affair became more suggestive.

Dorgan sprung to the ground, gave a few directions to his driver, and then walked to the church door. It had been closed, but he turned the knob and entered the vestibule. Beyond was the vestry, and he saw there just the kind of a scene he had expected.

He saw a gray-haired old man who seemed to be a minister, and near him were four other persons. Of these, only two interested the detective.

They were the late passengers of the cab; and as he looked the lady turned so that he saw her face. What he saw was so unexpected that he started back in astonishment.

The lady was Claudia Woodside!

"Ha! this grows interesting!" muttered Dorgan. "If signs are not most marvelously deceptive this is to be a wedding, and only one person here looks like a bride. But can it be—is it possible that the daughter of Professor Woodside is to be married thus? Would *she* be a party to a runaway match? It don't seem possible!"

It did not seem possible, but circumstances were very significant. There stood the girl with her hand in that of a handsome young man, and the minister was looking at them as though they were to be the chief actors in a solemn scene.

And was this Claudia Woodside, the proud and irreproachable?

Her companion was a man of prepossessing appearance, but it went without saying that there must be some bar against him. Miss Woodside certainly need not run away to be married unless her intended husband was in some way objectionable.

"It's all Woodside now!" thought Duke Dorgan. "Great Scott! one would think they had been started by dynamite. What will they do next? It's in order, I believe, for Philip to do some strange thing. But this proud girl—who would think of her in such a role? Who is this man she dares not marry openly?"

For the young couple had joined hands, and the voice of the gray-haired old minister was rising and falling solemnly as he proceeded with the ceremony.

There was an intense look on both young faces, and it was clear they realized that they were doing what would make their future happy or miserable; but the proud bride's eyes were tender and her chosen companion bore himself in a way which pleased Duke Dorgan.

His name had reached the detective's ears—Mr. Hathaway, the minister had called him, and the progress of the ceremony showed his Christian name to be Ralph.

Silently the unseen witness watched to the end. He saw the invited witnesses, an aged man and woman, sign the certificate, and then stole back to his cab.

He wanted to see where Claudia would go next.

Finally she came out with Hathaway. They re-entered their cab and drove away, while once more the pursuer followed. Somewhat to his surprise they returned to Woodside House.

There Claudia bade farewell to the man in whose hands she had placed her future, and turned and entered the grounds.

She had gone away as Miss Woodside, a girl with no care, and the heiress of a man who loved her devotedly. She returned a married woman, after a ceremony which, for some reason, she had seen fit to make a secret one.

Probably she realized that it would make a great difference in her life, but neither she nor any one else suspected what tragic, painful events would follow that night wedding.

CHAPTER VI.

A STARTLING CRISIS.

DUKE DORGAN secured what sleep he could that night, and awoke the next morning in good condition for work. He certainly had enough to do. The Woodside puzzle lay revealed, and it was for him to solve it. He began the investigation with uncommon zeal, feeling that important developments were to be expected.

His first step was to make cautious inquiries in regard to Mr. Levi Peters. He wished to learn why this person was in the case, and what he was trying to do.

The first was easily learned. On inquiring he was told that Peters was a private detective, and when he went to Police Headquarters, he learned that the man was known there, and rated as a fairly honest person.

This put a new aspect on the case. He had before regarded Peters as a mere blackmailer, but it now began to look as though another detective was in the field, and that it was to be a race to see who would win.

Peters had secured the better start, but chance had put Deep Duke in possession of facts he must have been a long time in learning otherwise, and he felt capable of running the race out.

If his rival won he must bestir himself in earnest.

Mature thought had satisfied him that it was absurd to connect Professor Woodside with Zachary Rose. He had thought so at first, but events had seemed to indicate it, while Peters's talk with Abe Benlow had shown that he had the same idea; but surely it was too absurd to believe.

True, Duke's experience as a detective had emphasized the fact that no man was above suspicion; the richest and most respected might one day have been leading a crooked life; but, in the case of the professor, here was a man who had been publicly before the world for years—surely, he had had no time to figure as Zachary Rose, or serve a term in prison.

No; he could not be a subject of suspicion.

To settle the matter decisively he had only to go to some old friend of the professor and question him. He had the date of Zachary Rose's residence in Bangor, and that of a certain convict's term in some prison; he had only to prove that Woodside was at that time in Jersey City or New York, and the last doubt would vanish.

He knew just the man to question, and was soon in the laboratory of another scientific man.

They had met before and the visit did not seem at all strange nor was Dorgan at a loss how to approach his subject without arousing suspicion.

He led the scientist to speak of his labors, and of the distinguished men he had met; and thus the host was brought to speak first of Archibald Woodside.

"You and he are old friends, I presume," Duke suggested.

"Professionally, we are."

"And have both lived in Jersey City all the time?"

"Here, or in the vicinity."

"Have you traveled much?"

"Only in the way of brief trips in the interests of my chosen calling."

"Will the same remark apply to Woodside? Does he never go away for any length of time?"

"No—that is, not of late years. He did make a tour of Europe a score of years ago, and was gone four or five years."

"That was twenty years ago?"

"In 18—, to be precise, I think."

The detective was interested. It was the same year in which Zachary Rose took to himself a wife in Bangor. It was an odd coincidence, but, of course, nothing more.

"Did you then correspond with him?"

"No. He did not go abroad as a scientist, but for his health, and nobody heard from him, so far as I know, until he returned home, bronzed and improved in health. He had been in wild lands where postal facilities were unknown, which explained his silence."

Deep Duke was not so sure of that. Men like Archibald Woodside are not the kind who leave home and give no sign to their waiting families for four or five years.

It was very odd. Could it be that when the professor was supposed to be in the Old World he was really in Maine, figuring as Zachary Rose and wedding a second wife, only to desert her a little later?

It did not seem possible, but against what was probable rose Dorgan's knowledge of the world. His professional experience had been such as to

lead him to believe that no life was too quiet to have its mystery, and no man too grave and prepossessing to have sown a bountiful crop of wild oats at some period of his life.

He learned nothing more of importance, and, starting for the house which now sheltered Mrs. Rose, he meditated on the situation anew.

"The best thing I can do," he decided, "is to at once give the woman a sight of Professor Woodside. I am not hired to explain all his comings and goings during the period of his absence—simply to find Mrs. Rose's husband. I may be able to do this at one stroke."

He was still skeptical, and hoped it would prove otherwise. Not only did it seem a pity to ruin the reputation of a man esteemed so honest, but it would be a severe experience for Philip Woodside to know he had hired a detective to hunt down his own father.

Mrs. Rose was in when he reached the house.

"I'm glad you have come," she said.

"Anything new?"

"Well, you see I have sent for Mr. Woodside to see if he fully understands the expense of an investigation. My landlady here suggested that it might cost more than he would be willing to pay."

"I suppose you mean Mr. Philip Woodside?"

"The young gentleman who is helping me—yes, I believe his name is Philip."

"Have you seen his father?"

"No, sir."

"Well, before Philip comes, I want to talk with you. Have you relatives in Bangor?"

"Some distant ones."

"Any who would oppose your efforts to find your husband?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"Have you reason to believe any one else would do so?"

"No."

"Have you ever employed another detective?"

"Never!"

She seemed to be answering truthfully and confidently, and Duke was left to wonder more than ever how Levi Peters had come into the case.

"By the way," he resumed, "have you a specimen of your husband's writing?"

"No, sir."

"Was he an educated man?"

"Oh, dear, no! I could scarcely read what he wrote, it was so scrawly and poorly-spelled."

"Was he in good health?"

"Strong as an ox."

This did not seem to apply to the run-down professor who had "gone abroad for his health." "Did he care for scientific things? For instance, did he ever dabble in chemicals, or have a fondness for flowers?" the detective continued.

Mrs. Rose laughed.

"Bless your soul, no! He didn't know one flower from another, and as for chemistry, it was even worse."

Another block to the theory. Duke sat silent for several seconds, and then resumed:

"I wish you could show me some of his handwriting."

"I haven't a scrap."

"Not even his signature? Women always preserve their marriage-certificate. Isn't his name there?"

A sudden look of grave annoyance appeared on the woman's face.

"I haven't the certificate," she said, slowly, after a pause.

"No? Then how will you *prove* the marriage, if he denies that one was ever performed between you?"

"I don't know."

Her manner convinced the detective that there was something which she was keeping back, and he determined to learn what it was. Convinced that it was connected with the certificate, he watched her sharply, and went on:

"I wonder that you parted with such a valuable paper, Mrs. Rose."

"Zachary took it just after we were married, and I supposed that he was taking care of it carefully. I never worried about it until he disappeared, and then I did not know where to find it. He had taken it from the house, you see."

"Did he not say where he placed it?"

"No, sir."

"Why did he take it?"

"He said it would be safer."

"How safer? If you lived together after your marriage it would naturally have been kept in the house, and if cared for by one it would be by the other. Where would it be safer? In a bank? Did you allow him to take it without asking what he was to do with it?"

"I asked, and he said he would put it in a safe place."

Mrs. Rose repeated this statement nervously, and her gaze failed to meet Dorgan's. His close questioning and equally close regard troubled her. He saw this and decided that she must have some unusual reason for her uneasiness.

"Madam," he said, somewhat sternly, "how do you expect me to win your case when you keep anything back from me?"

"What do you mean?"

Her eyes were raised, but the light in them was a startled one. What ground he was tread-

ing on Duke did not know, but it was plainly delicate footing.

"I mean that you are asking me to work blindfolded—you are handicapping me when my work is already difficult. Why don't you tell the truth?"

Tersely, incisively the words fell from his lips, and Mrs. Rose looked panic-stricken. People usually did when Deep Duke Dorgan showed his power, but to save his life the detective could not tell what all this disturbance was about.

Just at this moment some sound in the street caused him to look out of the window. What he saw first was immaterial, but he saw something more. Coming down the street with slow, sedate steps was Professor Archibald Woodside.

The detective started. The scientist might be there by chance, but his appearance gave Duke a suspicion. Whether this was correct he did not know, but he resolved to turn his presence into use.

Mrs. Rose's voice arose to disturb his planning.

"I have told the truth, sir," she faintly asserted.

"Not all; there is a mystery in the case. I insist on knowing it if I take your case. Does it concern you or Zachary Rose, or both? And what about the certificate?"

One moment the woman hesitated, and then a flush of defiance mounted to her face.

"I have told all that is necessary," she retorted, trying to steady her voice. "I'm not obliged to tell all about my private affairs, nor all that is unpleasant and—dangerous. You are asked to find Zachary Rose—no more."

The faintest possible smile moved Dorgan's lips.

"Let us change the subject for one moment, Mrs. Rose. You say you asked young Woodside here. Is this he who is coming?"

The woman arose and looked out of the window. The professor was almost at hand, moving decorously, slowly, and as gravely as one of his eminence should.

Mrs. Rose looked at him, and a puzzled expression swept over her face. She started—grew pale. Duke Dorgan watched her with cat-like keenness. Every varying shade on her face was studied, and he was not surprised when she wheeled and sprung toward the door.

"It is he—Zachary Rose—my husband!" she wildly cried.

At that moment the door-bell rung. Professor Woodside was seeking admittance.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WEAK POINT IN THE CASE.

It was plainly the woman's intention to confront Woodside at once, but this was far from being Deep Duke's idea of how the matter should be conducted. He caught Mrs. Rose by the arm.

"He must not see you," the detective exclaimed.

"Not see me? He must and *shall*!" cried Mrs. Rose, excitedly.

"Not if I manage your case. That man is one of the most prominent citizens of Jersey City, and he lives surrounded by a family. Do you suppose he would willingly *recognize* you? If he should decline to recognize you, what would you do?—how prove your marriage? Where is your certificate? Where are your witnesses?"

These words, vehemently spoken, carried conviction to Mrs. Rose's mind. She might regret her course afterward and pin her faith on Zachary Rose, according to woman's way, but just then she saw with the detective's eyes and beheld thin ice ahead.

"I'll do what you say," she answered, quickly.

"Then go up-stairs, and do not under any circumstance come down until I call you. Go!"

She went, and Deep Duke was alone just in time to receive Professor Woodside, who had been admitted by the landlady. He looked puzzled, but his face cleared at sight of the detective.

"Ah! is it you, sir? I could not imagine what this summons to call meant."

"Were you asked to call?"

"Why, certainly."

"It was a mistake then, professor. The messenger should have said Mr. Philip Woodside."

"Oh! I see. Well, I wondered what any one could want of me, *here*."

The speaker hesitated a moment, and then a new expression flashed over his face.

"If it is not a secret, may I inquire who wants to see my son?"

"It is his *protegee*, the woman of whom I told you."

"The deserted wife?"

"Yes."

"Then, sir, I have no more to say or do here. I do not care to see these wretched women who can't live with their husbands."

He was turning excitedly toward the door when Dorgan quietly added:

"Perhaps you would change your opinion if you were to see her, Mr. Woodside. May I call her?"

"No, sir, you may not!" and the professor's

cane came down forcibly on the floor. "I tell you I will have nothing to do with such persons. My son is a foolish young man, and he will be wiser when his head has grown gray. I wish you joy of your deserted wife!"

It was a strange thing to see the grave professor so excited—even angry—and Duke hastened to try and smooth over matters somewhat. He was scarcely heard, and not heeded in the least. The professor found the door, and was soon striding away down the street at a pace which would have astonished his scientific friends.

He left Deep Duke in a highly satisfied mood. The messenger's mistake had borne fruit not to be despised; not only had Woodside again revealed unusual emotion, but Mrs. Rose had positively identified him as her husband.

The detective was forced to conclude that during the time his friends supposed him to be in the Old World, twenty years before, the professor had really been living a life in Maine for which he could not account.

It was very odd that Archibald Woodside should figure as a lumberman; stranger still that he should leave home as an invalid, and soon appear in Bangor as an athletic laborer.

He had committed no offense against the law by marrying the present Mrs. Rose, the mother of Philip and Claudia having died before his pilgrimage, but Deep Duke found his case growing more important.

If Mrs. Rose was legally Mrs. Archibald Woodside, she ought to be supported as became her position, not left in poverty like a cast-off toy.

He called her down-stairs. She had partially recovered her calmness, but her eyes glittered in a way which boded no good to Archibald Woodside.

"I heard what he said," she began, abruptly. "So he calls me 'a wretched woman,' does he?"

"I have reason to believe he does know who you are, Mrs. Rose. He objects to having aid given you, but, it seems, only on general principles."

"You called him Mr. Woodside. Is that his name now?"

"It is his real name, and he is the father of Philip Woodside, your benefactor."

"My benefactor no longer; I'll have no more to do with him. I came here to find a husband, but all I now want is revenge! So that man is rich! So he is caring for his viper children, lawful or otherwise, while I—his wife—am left to almost starve alone! I wash my hands of the whole brood, but I want revenge!"

Duke had not believed the little woman capable of such vindictiveness, but, accustomed to people of all moods, he quietly replied:

"I never helped a person to secure revenge, as such, madam, and do not intend to, but in your case we need not falter. If you have told me the truth, and are really married legally to him—or so believe yourself—it is not revenge, but justice, which you seek."

"I have told you the truth."

"Then what have you concealed?"

One moment Mrs. Rose hesitated; then she answered with an air of sincerity:

"Whatever I have kept back was in pity for one to whom I hoped to be reunited—one I hoped was worthy. My husband did not leave Bangor so mysteriously as I told you. I know, and knew then, that he fell among evil associates, and became mixed up with some unlawful act—"

"What act?"

"That I don't know. I wish I did. One of his friends—one of the gang that led him into trouble—came to the house for things Zachary needed. I never saw my husband after that. I know these things were for him to use in his flight—they were in the way of clothing—and I suppose he got off safely."

"But the man who came to your house—where is he?"

"That I don't know. I suppose he fled, too."

"Did you never see him again?"

"Never."

"You are telling the whole truth now?"

"I am, sir."

"Have you no idea what crime caused your husband to run away?"

"No. I have tried my best to surmise, but I cannot. I feel sure it was nothing very bad."

This weak defense showed that she had not yet stamped out all love for the man. She slowly continued:

"You see, Mr. Dorgan, I was not in good health at the time, and the strain on my nervous system was too much for me. I took to my bed and was delirious with brain fever for weeks. I have never been the same woman since."

"Well, it would be foolish for us to expect Archibald Woodside to accept you as his wife now. His conduct in leaving you in poverty for a score of years shows just what kind of a man he is, and he is now almost in a position to defy you. He is rich and respected of all men, and of high worldly position. You are poor and unknown. Your only hope of justice is to prove your marriage!"

A shadow appeared on Mrs. Rose's face.

"And the only way to do this is to produce

the certificate, or the witnesses," Duke slowly added, watching her closely.

"They are both dead, and so is the minister."

"And the certificate?"

"I told you I did not know where it was."

"Has it never occurred to you that Zachary Rose had a dishonorable motive in taking it away from you?"

"It occurs to me now—and I have doubted him before. There is something about that which I never understood."

"What was that?"

"I suppose it will be hard for a man to realize the fact, but I was so frightened and confused when being married that the whole affair was like a dream. I went through it mechanically, and though I signed my name to something, I could not have told whether it was a marriage-certificate or something else. You see, I was only a shy, inexperienced girl."

"Do you doubt that the certificate was genuine?"

"Oh! no."

"Then what is it you don't understand?"

"I don't know but you will doubt me when I explain. I said I was like one in a dream when I was married. Well, afterward, when the certificate was gone and it was too late, it began to dawn upon me that the minister had not used the name of my husband during the ceremony. As one dimly, imperfectly remembers a dream, so I thought I remembered another name."

"What name?"

"That was what I tried to remember, but could not. I asked my husband about it, and he laughed at me. He declared that I had imagined all this, but—"

"You did not believe him."

"I have always doubted and wondered, and now, in the light of your revelations, I wonder under what name he married me."

"It may have been Archibald Woodside."

"I don't know."

Mrs. Rose sighed and looked silently at vacancy, while Deep Duke found ample food for thought. If she was not mistaken, he saw in her later revelations the twisting and turning of a man sailing under false colors. Perhaps she had been loved as much as the average wife, and her husband had used his real name, intending to recognize her sometime; but after a while his love waned, as love will, and she was the loser.

Resuming conversation, he asked several more questions, hoping to gain some clew to the missing certificate, or to Zachary Rose's crime, but without avail.

He was forced to decide that he must look elsewhere for his information, and his mind turned to Levi Peters and Abe Benlow. The former seemed to confidently connect Woodside with a man who had been in prison with Abe, and the latter certainly knew what prison was referred to.

These men must be seen and their secrets gained.

This was easily said, but Deep Duke foresaw a hard struggle. Peters was also a detective, and was undoubtedly in the field against him—though, as yet, perhaps not aware that he had a rival. He would not willingly tell what he knew; this must be learned by stratagem.

One of the most essential elements of success was to recover the marriage-certificate which would prove Mrs. Rose a legal wife. If it was not destroyed, and he felt that it was not, it might still be in the place where Zachary Rose had placed it for safety.

Where was that place?

"My case is not complete until the certificate is found," Dorgan thought. "Without it, Mrs. Rose poor and unknown, cannot hope to conquer rich Archibald Woodside. The certificate must be found. But how?"

It was a knotty question to answer.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOMETHING ABOUT THE HATHAWAYS.

CLAUDIA WOODSIDE was moving about the elegantly arranged grounds of her father's house, pausing here and there to admire a flower or shrub. Much of the beauty of the place was due to her. Professor Woodside could have told all about every growing thing on the place, but the good taste which was everywhere visible was due to the young lady's judgment.

This little plot of land was her pride and delight, and here she passed many pleasant hours.

Society people complained that she did not show due interest in the momentous affairs that occupied their minds, and such was the fact. She had no love for society. Not being as critical as her father she had not taken the trouble to analyze the high world and point out its hollowness; she simply knew that she was bored by it.

Under a reserved, almost proud, exterior, she hid the soul of a dreamer. Naturally averse to confidence in any one in regard to such matters, she concealed much of her nature; even her father and brother did not understand her.

On this occasion she was glad to be alone in the grounds, and her mind was busily occupied. She had more occasion to think than ever before.

She was no longer Miss Woodside, though this

fact was known to but few. The eventful step of the previous evening had given her a new position. She was the wife of Ralph Hathaway, and the fact promised to make serious trouble in the future. When the blow would fall she did not know; she hoped it might be averted for some time, and she had only consented to the private marriage when Hathaway promised to remain silent and wait patiently for the time when he could claim her.

When this would be neither knew. Hathaway was poor, and the professor objected to him. The young couple felt that they could wait, however.

Claudia was still moving about among the roses when a servant came to say that her father wished to see her in his study.

She obeyed the summons at once.

The room gave no evidence that the professor had been engaged in labor that morning, and Claudia wondered why she had been sent for, but Woodside quietly motioned toward a chair.

"Have you work about which I can help you?" she asked, affecting a lightness of manner to hide a sudden uneasiness.

"No."

The professor spoke mechanically, and then showed more interest and added:

"I have sent for you with a very different motive."

Something in his manner told her that trouble was to be expected. He had ever been kind to her, until he opposed Ralph Hathaway's suit, and then his opposition was more grave and regretful than anything else. She did not expect harshness from him now, but did expect something unpleasant.

"Indeed!" was all she could reply, and even this did not satisfy her.

"I wish to speak of Ralph Hathaway," added the professor, in his straightforward way.

Claudia's face flushed deeply. Did her father know all concerning the night marriage? She was too startled to make any answer.

"You are aware that I have before spoken to you concerning this young man. I had hoped I would not have to mention it again, but I learn that you have since had secret meetings with him."

Woodside's voice and manner were still kind, but they were very grave. Claudia, however, breathed a trifle freer. He had said nothing to show that he knew of the secret marriage; if he did not, all might yet be well.

"Is that any great crime, sir?" she asked.

"Have I not asked you to drop his acquaintance?"

"And am I not old enough to judge for myself—to choose my friends for myself?"

It was not a defiant answer. While her father spoke so kindly, she could not but follow his example.

"Possibly you are when you choose with open eyes. Here you are like one blindfolded. What do you know of Ralph Hathaway?"

"I know he is a gentleman, and an honorable man."

"I am not prepared to dispute it, for I know nothing about it. But what of his family?"

Claudia hesitated for a moment.

"His only relative is his mother."

"Where is his father?"

"He is not living."

"Claudia, it is far from my taste to rake up the past, but do you know what sort of man the senior Hathaway was?"

"Do I? No, sir."

"I do."

"You seem to intimate that he was not a model man, but I will remind you that I have nothing to do with him."

"If you marry his son, you will enter a family upon which rests a blot which cannot be washed away in a generation. I knew the elder Hathaway; I know what his character was. I pray that a child of mine may never enter his family. He was a disreputable wretch—I cannot speak of him in milder terms. His son may be well enough outwardly, but bad blood runs in his veins and the curse is on his race."

"Did his father commit a crime?"

"Yes."

"What was it?" Claudia straightforwardly asked.

"I must request permission not to explain. I repeat that it is painful to me to recall this matter. My motto is, let the dead rest in their graves. Hathaway died when his son was a mere babe, and I, for one, am willing to let him and his misdeeds rest."

"Why should Ralph be made to suffer for another's acts?" was the spirited inquiry.

"Were you to marry him," patiently, kindly answered the professor, "it would recall the past, and every gossip would be saying that you—my daughter—had married Temple Hathaway's son. The moment you did this the door of every respectable house would be closed against you."

It was a sweeping assertion, and Claudia sat looking at her father in a species of alarm. If he had not spoken exaggeratedly, she was already in the rapids. She was Ralph Hathaway's wife.

"Of course," Woodside continued, "my chief motive in warning you is to save you from a

wretched future. Your happiness is my chief consideration, but there is more. You know that we trace our ancestry back over three hundred years. During all that time there has been no stain on our family name. No man or woman of our race has done a dishonorable deed; no one has had the finger of scorn pointed at him or her. It is a record of which we may well be proud. I hope we may never come under censure or scorn."

The solemn warning had due effect, but Claudia could not listen to it if she would.

She was Ralph Hathaway's wife.

"I think it only justice to me to say what crime Temple Hathaway committed," she nervously said.

Woodside was silent for several minutes; then he slowly replied:

"If you refuse to listen to me, I authorize you to say to your lover—if so you regard the young man—that when he can prove his family clear from all blame he can figure as your friend. I have no wish to be severe, and the fact that he is poor is of no consequence. What I ask of the man who is to be your husband is character to match the sterling honor of the Woodside."

Claudia's face brightened, but the professor made a grave gesture, and added:

"Wait! It is no more than fair that I tell you this hope can never be realized. When the Ethiopian changes his color, and not before, can Temple Hathaway's record be cleared."

The girl was not sorry that the announcement of a visitor ended the interview at this point. She felt incapable of coping with her father. He would not explain his own words, and, acting in the dark, she could not meet him with arguments.

She went to her own room and sat down to think.

As she did so her gaze wandered to the grounds beyond the house, and she saw Horace Wilberson pacing along a walk. She had rather liked her brother's guest, but as she saw him glance up, plainly with the hope of seeing her come to join him, sudden dislike went out against him.

She was not in the mood to tolerate attention from other men now—all her thoughts were of Ralph.

What meant this shadow which had been raised by her father? Was there really something horrible in the life of the elder Hathaway? She told herself that she would not allow it to make any difference with Ralph, even if she was in a position to recede from her attachment to him; but the cold, hard fact that she could not recede if she would, was not to be wholly defied.

After some minutes' thought she sat down and wrote a letter to young Hathaway, explaining all, and begging him to clear his father's name if he could.

She went down-stairs to give the letter to a servant for mailing, and thus ran unexpectedly upon Wilberson. He stopped her and asked if she would go out into the grounds.

Her first impulse was to decline, but then came the thought that she might succeed in passing the time better if she went. Accordingly she put on her hat, and they were soon walking together.

Had she suspected that Wilberson's sole object in seeking the interview was to get a chance to make a formal declaration of his love, she might not have been so ready to go; and had he suspected how his intention would be frustrated, he certainly would have prayed that she might never come out until the danger was past.

They were walking slowly along when some one else suddenly appeared on the scene.

It is not pleasant for people of high life to deal with tramps in any form, and when an ugly, ragged, none-too-clean, disreputable-looking fellow so unexpectedly blocked their way, it was natural that they should feel unusual emotion over it.

Claudia was not frightened. The disreputable person was smiling, as though peaceably inclined, and at the worst Wilberson could throw him out. So she thought, but if she had looked closely at Mr. Wilberson's face, she might have been surprised.

He actually seemed frightened. The familiar, knowing manner in which the intruder looked at him seemed to have unexpected effect. Wilberson was dismayed, to say the least.

If Duke Dorgan had been there he would have recognized the disreputable man as Abe Benlow, and seen a significance about his presence there.

The fellow winked at Wilberson, and then gravely said:

"I say, young feller, kin you tell me whar the boss o' this palace is?"

"No."

It was really a mechanical reply, but Wilberson was alarmed, and it came out sharply.

"Whom do you wish to see?" calmly asked Claudia, thinking this the easiest way to get rid of the man.

"Does one Archibald Woodside live hyar?"

"This is Mr. Woodside's."

"I'd like ter git my optics onter him."

"What is your business?"

Abe removed his hat and scratched his head slowly.

"Wal, ez I said, it's ter see him—ter gaze onter his classic feetur's. I want ter see ef his face is familiar. I once had a chum named Archibald Woodside; wanter see ef it's the same man."

"This is absurd, sir," said Claudia, severely, "and the sooner you take yourself out of sight the better. We do not care to have strangers on the grounds."

"Oh! come now, you wouldn't drive me away, would ye? Young chap, say a good word fur me, will yer?"

Wilberson's lips moved, but not a word did he speak. He was too frightened. A word from this disreputable fellow, who knew him well, would ruin all his chances with Claudia. Not suspecting that she was married, he still built his air-castles as lovers will.

"All I want is one squint at the boss," added Abe, who had come to obtain his wish on the sly, but had grown suddenly bold at finding an old acquaintance there.

"My father does not want to see you, and I hope you will not compel me to call a servant," said Claudia, somewhat severely.

Abe's eyes twinkled angrily.

"You'd better not!" he retorted, "or I might sorter make it hot fur you. Mebbe I could tell that about yer high an' mighty family that would make it uncomfortable."

Claudia changed color. The secret she had to conceal was always foremost in her mind, and she believed the disreputable man knew it.

"Won't you go away?" she asked, almost imploringly.

"Yes, my good man," added Wilberson, "pray go, and I will give you a dollar."

Abe grinned. He saw that both were afraid of him, and enjoyed his temporary power greatly.

"Don't think I will," he returned. "Ef Archy Woodside is a chum o' mine, ez seems likely, I orter hev a seat at his table. I'm goin' in ter see the old chap."

CHAPTER IX.

A TERRIBLE REVELATION.

ABE had no intention of keeping his threat, but he enjoyed worrying his two companions, as people of low natures will.

He was in earnest when he said that he wanted a look at Professor Woodside. His present movements were the result of his interview with Levi Peters. A chance remark on his part had put Peters on the scent, and when he saw that the private detective was interested, he magnified his own knowledge.

Really, he had no idea what had become of the man who had been his friend when they were serving a certain State in her prison. A score of years had passed since then, and he had almost forgotten the details of that unhappy experience, but the scent of gold brightened his memory a good deal.

The last interview with Peters had put him thoroughly on the alert. If there was money to be made, he wanted the lion's share. Peters had declared that he knew the other ex-convict, "now a fine gentleman," and had intimated that his name was Zachary Rose or Archibald Woodside.

Abe was not a scientist, and was not posted in regard to the names of those who were, but inquiry had caused him to learn that there really was a rich Archibald Woodside, and he had come to see if he was his old friend.

He was now playing with the young people in a cat-and-mouse style, and his last assertion had filled both with dismay when the aspect of the case was changed by the appearance of Professor Woodside himself.

Neither Claudia nor Horace Wilberson was pleased to see him. The former, believing that Abe knew of her marriage, feared that the disreputable man would reveal it; Wilberson, knowing what a hold Abe had upon him, feared that his own character would be ventilated.

The professor advanced with his usual placid expression changing to a frown. He was not pleased to see such a person as Benlow on his premises.

"Who is this?" he curtly asked.

"A strange intruder, father," Claudia answered.

Abe had been looking at the professor with a puzzled expression, but he now aroused and took off his battered hat.

"Not so much o' a stranger ez I might be, I reckon," he said, boldly.

"Not a stranger?" Woodside repeated. "I don't recognize you."

"Twenty years change a man," confidently asserted Benlow.

"Twenty years!" echoed the professor.

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"Throw yer reekollection back that much an' you may recall my face."

"I don't."

"I'm Abe Benlow, yer know?"

"I never heard the name before."

"No? Come now, think ag'in. I was 61, yer see."

"Sixty-one? I don't understand."

"Oh! I mean the house by the river—the fine old mansion, yer know. See?"

Abe winked in a very significant way, but if the professor did know he did not acknowledge the fact.

"You talk wholly in riddles. I fail to catch your meaning at all."

"Why, I mean that twenty years ago you an' me was 'in' tergether. Don't you ketch on? I was 61; Abe Benlow by name. See?"

He was still winking violently, and it seemed that Woodside had the idea at last. Abe noticed that he started, looked startled, even lost a portion of his color. Abe felt elated. His scheme of settling the matter quietly, blinding the people and having a talk with his old friend aside—from whom he expected a generous sum of money—bade fair to be a success.

But—could Mr. Benlow believe his ears?—the professor suddenly sharply replied:

"No, I don't see, and I will hear no more of your nonsense. I thought you were a man I might have helped some time, but I see you are a fraud. All this roundabout, vague talk is nonsense. I must ask you to move on, and if you do not obey the hint, I will send a servant out to speak with you."

Before the last word was fairly spoken, Mr. Woodside was in retreat, walking toward the house at a pace unusually rapid for him.

Abe looked after him in stupid surprise for several seconds, and then his face flushed angrily.

"By the Old Harry! you shall pay fur that, my fine chap! So you'll hev me throwed out, will yer? Ef you do, it'll be the onhealthiest job you ever grappled onto. I'll tell all I know about yer!"

He turned toward Wilberson and Claudia, but they had imitated the professor's example and were following him to the house. Benlow was left alone. He smiled in an ugly way, and then turned toward the house.

"I'll go," he muttered; "but ef they think they are rid o' me so easy, they make the biggest mistake o' their lives. Driven out, be I? By the fiends! I'll drag them all through the mud fur that!"

Growling like a sore-headed bear, he made his way to the gate; then with a last malevolent glance at the house, he strode away down the street.

Claudia excused herself to Wilberson and went to her father's study. She knocked twice before any answer was returned, and then was surprised to find that the door was locked; something very remarkable. The professor turned the key, opened the door a few inches and looked out.

His face looked unusually pale.

"What is wanted?" he asked, almost curtly.

"I wanted to spe'k of—of that man."

"I don't care to hear about him."

"But he went away uttering threats against you, and said he would tell all he knew about you. Of course he could tell nothing to your disadvantage—I know you too well to suppose that—but he seems to be a vicious wretch, and I wanted you to know of his threats. He might try to harm you."

"True—true. He looks to be such a man, and I will look out for him—that is, his mere idle threats. They amount to nothing. And now, pray excuse me. If Mr. Hathaway calls, let me know. Thank you, my dear!"

The professor spoke hurriedly, and in a voice quite different from his usual one. He was plainly agitated about something, and as he finished speaking he closed the door without much ceremony and locked it.

Claudia gazed at the barrier in astonishment.

"Why does he act so strangely? What does it mean? Is he so very angry about Ralph?"

She had to go back to her room with the question unsolved, but not forgotten. Mr. Woodside was in a mood new to her, and she could not understand it at all. The perturbation brought about by her own affairs led her to think only of them, and she did not connect the disreputable man in rags with her father's strange mood.

Half an hour later Ralph Hathaway called. She received him, and plainly explained what Mr. Woodside had said in regard to their intimacy.

It was a serious matter for both. The secret marriage had put it out of their power to retreat if they would, and they must consider the matter, not as lovers, but as man and wife.

Whatever Temple Hathaway may have been, his son was a fine-looking young man. Somewhat above the average height, he had a fine, athletic form, and his face was manly, frank and prepossessing. If physiognomy went for anything, he was one to scorn a mean act—one to deal honorably with all mankind.

The new complication troubled him greatly. His father he could not remember, and he knew next to nothing about him, but this was the first intimation he had ever received that there was a blot on his name.

"I cannot believe but there is a mistake," he said, earnestly. "My mother has always spoken tenderly of her dead husband, and she is the soul of honor. She would recoil from anything

criminal. I must see Mr. Woodside and have this explained."

"Shall I call him now?"

"If you will."

Claudia went away, while Ralph remained in deep perplexity. He had known that the professor objected to him, but anything like this had never occurred to him. He was touched in a sensitive part, and felt that he would not breathe freely again until his name was cleared of the blemish imputed to it.

In a few moments Claudia returned, and after her came the professor.

The latter seemed to have recovered his calmness, and when Hathaway arose he motioned him back to his chair, but himself remained standing.

"I suppose Miss Woodside has explained the purport of what I have to say," he abruptly began.

"She has, sir, and I must say that I am greatly surprised and—"

"That is quite possible. It does not follow that you know all about your family history; I don't assert that you do. I should be the last man to bring up unpleasant things of the past, but it is imperatively necessary now. If Miss Woodside unites her fortunes with yours she will lose her position in society, and her friends will turn from her as from one smitten with a deadly fever. If you respect her, you should save her from that, if for no other reason."

"But, in heaven's name, what is it that would cause all this?" cried Ralph, excitedly. "What is this blemish on my father's name?"

"You must go elsewhere to learn. I regret that necessity has compelled me to say as much as I have; it is painful to tell a son that his father was not a worthy man. Particulars I will not give. I called you here merely to say that if you were to marry Claudia you would drag her down hopelessly—ruin her and blast her future—and having said this I am done."

Woodside had pronounced these words standing as stiff as a soldier, and he now turned to leave the room.

Claudia sprang forward to intercept him, but he raised one hand with a commanding gesture.

"I have nothing to add," he said, and walked from the room.

He left the young couple in despair and perplexity, but the first step out of the difficulty seemed plain.

"My mother!" exclaimed Ralph. "I will go to her at once, and this horrible mystery shall be explained."

He went with Claudia's kisses still warm on his mouth, and with her undying constancy ringing in his ears, but with a mind sorely beset by dark presentiments. Claudia was his wife—his for life and death—but to what fate had he dragged her down?

He found his mother—a tall, pale lady, whose face bore mingled traces of beauty and trouble—and began pouring his story into her ears.

"Mother," he said, vehemently, "I ask your forgiveness, but circumstances have led me to conceal an important fact from you. I have won the love of a noble girl and made her my wife—yes, my wife; we are irrevocably married; but now her father objects to me. Why? Because he says my father was a dishonorable man—a criminal. Tell me it is not true!"

Wonder, surprise, dismay and anger by turns appeared on Margaret Hathaway's face, and she answered much like a machine:

"Who is this man—this father of your wife—the accuser of your father?"

"His name," Ralph replied, is "Archibald Woodside."

Mrs. Hathaway recoiled.

"What?" she cried.

"Archibald Woodside."

Margaret Hathaway clung to the table with one hand, while the other was pressed over her heart, and upon her face was a look Ralph never forgot. She had grown pallid, and in her eyes was the light of a terror which awed and startled Ralph. He felt that some awful calamity was about to occur, but what it was he had no idea.

"And he—this man—you have married his daughter?" brokenly gasped Mrs. Hathaway.

"Yes; it is true; but, oh! what is wrong? What is this mystery, this secret?"

"Unfortunate boy," the mother interrupted, in a husky whisper, "may heaven have mercy on you and help you to bear the blow, but you had better have died than to marry that girl. He—Archibald Woodside—is the murderer of your father!"

CHAPTER X.

A TRAGEDY OF THE PAST.

RALPH HATHAWAY recoiled. He had been eagerly seeking for information, but this revelation had been wholly unexpected. The blow fell with a force which was for the moment almost overwhelming, but he did not at first think so much of the side of the affair which had so impressed his mother.

"My father murdered?" he finally echoed.

"Yes."

Margaret Hathaway spoke the one word faintly.

"And by Archibald Woodsides?"

"Yes."

"And I have never been told of it? And the assassin remains unpunished? Why is this? Why has not justice been done? Thank Heaven, I know the truth at last, and I will see that the law has its due!"

"Ralph, you forget. You say that this man's daughter is your wife. Oh! unfortunate boy, why did you not confide in me? I would have saved you from this, but now—now she is your wife. And her father murdered your father!"

Ralph's face became very pale. He had a finer, more sensitive nature than most men. From his mother, whose every emotion was acute, he had inherited peculiarities which had been strengthened by her training. His was not the nature to bear such a revelation calmly. Other men might have hated the assassin of their parent, but his all-absorbing feeling was one of horror.

At that moment he loathed Archibald Woodside as he would a hideous serpent, a vampire or a cannibal. If Margaret Woodside had never told him the dreadful truth, she had indirectly taught him to regard the matter as she regarded it.

If he had never met Claudia before, and had met her then, he would have shivered and shrunk from her with fear and horror. Her matchless beauty could not have offset the fact that her father had murdered his father.

Strong man that he was, the teaching of his youth swayed him then as the wind does the reed.

"What cruel fate pursues us?" continued Mrs. Hathaway, with a shiver. "It was a mad, mad marriage."

"I did not know," said Ralph, through white lips.

"It was your fate, but a cruel one. And that girl—she cannot be evil, or you would not have cared for her."

"She is the noblest of women."

"Poor child! poor child! She is the instrument of fate to bring punishment on her father, but it is hard that she—and you—should suffer for another's sin."

Ralph did not answer. He was staring gloomily at vacancy. He believed that he knew now why Professor Woodside had refused to explain, and why he had so vigorously opposed the marriage. It would have been better for all parties if he had spoken plainly at first, it would have averted the blow which had fallen.

"Tell me how you married her," said Margaret Hathaway, breaking the silence.

Ralph told the story in few words. He had met Claudia when she interested herself in the misfortunes of a poor family. Their only support, the aged father, was ill. He had been Ralph's fellow employee. From that meeting had come the love existing between him and Claudia, and that he had not told his mother anything was owing to the fact that he thought it would worry her to know that he had to do his wooing secretly.

Poverty was the responsible agent, as it is responsible for much trouble and crime.

"You must never see her again," said Mrs. Hathaway, abruptly.

"Never see Claudia?" cried the young man.

"No."

"But she is my wife."

"And her father is your father's murderer."

Ralph barely repressed a groan.

"You have not told me how my father died," he said, suddenly arousing. "I must know now."

"You shall know. My object in keeping the truth from you all these years was that I could see no good to be derived from telling you, and I thought you would be happier if ignorant of the truth. I never suspected that you would meet his daughter."

For a moment Mrs. Hathaway paused, and as her mind went back to the dark past she shivered pitifully. Her voice was firmer than might be expected, however, as she began her story.

"Your father, Temple Hathaway, was a native of New York city, and it was there that I met and married him. I need scarcely say that I thought him a king among men. Dark clouds have since arisen, and harsh, black things have been said about him, but my opinion has never changed. I know that he was a strictly honorable man."

"He was a man of some means, and, just before our marriage, he became the junior partner of a firm doing a wholesale business on Leonard street."

"All went well for two years, and when you were born we thought ourselves favored above all other people. Our home was happy, and business was good. But we little suspected what was in store for us."

"After a time your father began to mention the name of Archibald Woodside frequently, when speaking of his business. I knew nothing about business, and the few questions I asked gave me but little light, but I understood in a vague way that Woodside was a man who had laid before the firm an idea—one so bold that they hesitated to adopt it—by which he claimed to be able to make them all independently rich."

"One night my husband did not come as was usual, and I went to the store. I saw a light

burning in the office on the second floor. I tried the door and was surprised to find it unlocked. I entered, and went up-stairs."

The narrator paused, shivered, and her face grew paler and a pitiful light appeared in her dark eyes.

"What I saw in that office," she resumed, in a husky voice, "is ineffaceably branded on my memory, but it would kill me to describe it in detail. On the floor lay my husband, apparently senseless, and covered with blood. I uttered a wild cry and flung myself down beside him."

"Then his eyes opened and he looked at me intelligently. He feebly raised his arms and put them about me—feebly, for the cruel wound on his head had nearly taken all his strength, all his life."

"I am dying," he said, hoarsely. "Go at once for help, and let me make my last statement under oath. It will clear my name, and yours, and our boy's."

"I do not know how I got strength to understand and obey, for my heart seemed breaking, but I started from the office. He called me back."

"If I die before you return, remember this: The affairs of the firm may be found in an embarrassed condition, but I swear by all my hopes of heaven that I have done no dishonorable thing. I am as free from guilt as you are. More than this, I die at the hands of a cowardly assassin. Archibald Woodside shot me down in cold blood, like the demon he is. Now go, go for help. I must swear to this."

"I went, but when I returned he was senseless. He was revived only after some trouble, and was then evidently at the point of death. They asked him for the statement he wished to make, and he looked at them with fast-glazing eyes. I shall never forget his answer."

"I want justice done to all. I have committed suicide. Put it in writing."

"Plainly I heard these words, but I was so filled with grief that I did not think what the difference of the statement implied. The paper was prepared, but as they turned once more toward your father he turned his eyes toward me and whispered two words:

"In heaven!" he said, and then his eyes closed and he was lying lifeless in my arms."

Tears were falling thickly from Margaret Hathaway's eyes, and she paused several moments. When she resumed her voice had grown firmer.

"When the funeral was over a thunderbolt fell upon me. It was announced that the firm was bankrupt; that your father had speculated without the knowledge of the other partners and ruined them all by so doing; and that when exposure and disgrace stared him in the face he had killed himself."

"I told my story, but it availed nothing. Nobody but me had heard Temple say that Archibald Woodside murdered him, but they had heard him say that his own hand had done the deed. Circumstances confirmed this statement, and the coroner's jury gave a verdict to that effect."

"I made a hard struggle. I knew that murder had been done, and that your father never did a dishonest thing, but it was all in vain. The other partners denied that they had ever had any talk with Archibald Woodside, and knew no such person, and I found nobody to believe what I said and thought. Every one pronounced the worst verdict possible, and rumors became afloat to the effect that my lost husband had been shockingly dissipated."

"This I forced the worst of his enemies to admit as false, but the lie would not die. It was started, and plenty of mischievous tongues repeated it—the stories told and retold were something terrible."

"I finally became so broken down in health that I had to accept defeat and go into strict retirement. I went, leaving a heartless world to say the worst, but well aware that Temple Hathaway had been a thoroughly honest man, and had fallen by an assassin's hand."

"It was several years before I heard anything of Archibald Woodside. Then he settled where he now lives. People said that he had been abroad; that he was rich, respected, and influential."

"For a time I was undecided how to act, but when I looked at you, then a boy of about ten years, I found a counselor in my heart. Poverty and obscurity could not hope to fight wealth and prosperity successfully, while if I made any stir my enemy might take you from me."

"Knowing this, I settled back and followed the policy of silence, but I little suspected what would be the result. Ah! merciful Heaven, why did I not suspect? Why did I allow you to rush blindly upon your fate?"

There was a sharp agony in the closing words, but Ralph Hathaway took his mother's hands and kissed her with calmness not to be expected.

"Why should you blame yourself? You have committed no fault; I suppose fate willed that it should be so. Do not grieve, I implore you."

"But you are married—to his daughter."

Ralph shivered. His nature and his teaching placed a terrible significance upon the words. He felt that he ought to hate and loathe one related to Archibald Woodside—and Claudia was his wife.

There was a brief silence, and then he slowly replied:

"It may be that time has swept away all evidence by which this great wrong can be righted, but I will never rest until it has been tried. I shall at once put a detective on the track."

Mrs. Hathaway looked troubled.

"Our enemy may strike you as he struck your father."

"He cannot. My father did not know what a villain he was—I do."

"But his daughter?"

Ralph's face grew hard and stern.

"Justice shall be done though the heavens fall," he said, in an inexorable voice. "My father shall be avenged. Give me all the facts you can, and I will immediately go to a keen detective of whom I know."

"Is he a trustworthy man?"

"He is so regarded, though I do not myself know him. His name is Duke Dorgan."

CHAPTER XI.

AMONG THE BREAKERS.

DEEP DUKE was seated in his private room when his housekeeper announced a gentleman to see him. He directed that the caller be admitted, and in a minute more a young man stood in his presence at whom he stared with an exhibition of surprise seldom seen on his face.

Despite the change of scene, and the indistinct view he had first had of that person, he now recognized the man he had seen stand besides Claudia Woodside and speak the words which made their futures one.

"Good-evening, sir," said Ralph.

"Good-evening."

"I have come to consult you professionally, Mr. Dorgan."

"Well, I am at your service."

The detective was wondering if trouble had already resulted from the secret marriage, but he was soon set right. Ralph repeated the story he had just heard from his mother, telling it in strong, graphic terms which would have interested any one.

And what of Duke Dorgan? When he heard the name of Archibald Woodside mentioned in connection with it he grew intensely interested, and Hathaway little suspected how eagerly he followed what was said, or how certain points seemed to fit in as evidence.

When secretly listening to the conversation between Levi Peters and Abe Benlow he had heard the former declare that a certain man of whom he spoke was a murderer, and had then said that this man was named Archibald Woodside or Zachary Rose. At the same time Benlow had admitted that his fellow-convict—presumably the same man—had been wanted for murder.

Now this visitor stated that Woodside had killed his father.

All this was strange and startling, but Duke looked sharply at the speaker. Ralph had not mentioned his secret marriage, but the detective, already aware of it, wondered why the young man had married the daughter of his father's slayer and then at once taken steps to ruin him.

The possibilities of this case occurred to the detective, and he asked:

"How long have you known this story?"

"Not two hours."

There was a hopeless inflection to the speaker's voice which explained a good deal. Dorgan felt sure that the revelation had been the result of the secret marriage.

"Have you fully considered the possible results of attacking such a man as Professor Woodside?"

Ralph's face grew stern and hard as he replied:

"I have."

"He will fight desperately."

"I expect it."

"It is hard to bring a rich man to the gallows."

"To the gallows!"

Ralph could not help echoing the words—the cold, stubborn words which implied so much—and Dorgan saw that he was deeply agitated.

Nothing, however, could make him pause now.

"Justice must be done!" he added, in a hard voice.

"As you will."

The detective then asked several questions in regard to dates, and was surprised to see how neatly all fitted into shape.

August 10th, 18—, Temple Hathaway was killed, as he asserted, by Woodside. Presumably the latter then fled from the vicinity.

In August of the same year, the present Mrs. Rose met in Bangor the man whom she married, and who seemed to be Woodside.

Three years later Zachary Rose fled from Bangor, as admitted by his wife, to escape arrest for some crime. But did he escape it? It was less than a year after his flight that Abe Benlow, going to prison, found there a man whom Peters confidently asserted was Woodside.

And during all this period of time Archibald Woodside, august professor and esteemed citizen,

had by his own statement been in the Old World, but, oddly enough, had not written to his old friends at all.

Here was a chain of circumstances which, with the evidence given by Hathaway, seemed perfect and overwhelming. It only remained to *prove* what had been asserted, and to fill in the blanks, and Archibald Woodside would be hopelessly in the toils.

Dorgan was glad to obtain this new client. He knew it was absurd to suppose that the professor would ever receive Mrs. Rose as his wife. She would not have been left in poverty for twenty years if her husband had cared anything for her, nor was she fitted for the place in life where the Woodsides moved.

It was to be war to the knife, and he could act in the interest of Mrs. Rose and young Hathaway at the same time.

The latest revelation gave him valuable information, and it would enable him to start intelligently. He had the name of the firm of which Temple Hathaway was once a member, and though the name did not then appear in the New York Directory, he believed he could trace the other partners.

He prolonged the conversation with Ralph until he learned all that seemed possible, and then assured the young man that he would do his best to solve the mystery.

He did not mention that he already had an interest in Archibald Woodside's affairs.

Ralph went away, and then Deep Duke prepared for other work. It was on this evening that Abe Benlow had promised to see Peters and tell what he knew about the ex-convict, and the detective had not abandoned his intention of hearing what was said.

He donned a rough suit of clothes, such as seemed most appropriate to the low court where Abe lived, and then left the house.

Ralph returned home and reported the result of his visit to his mother. Having seen Duke Dorgan he was more than ever satisfied that the case would be attended to with zeal.

Neither he nor his mother showed much enthusiasm, however, and silence soon fell between them. Neither could forget that Claudia was Ralph's wife, and it was clear that an investigation must drag her down to disgrace and misery.

The peculiar nature of mother and son was plainly shown—there was much of the fanatic in both, and they were ready to go forward even though fresh misery was the result.

Temple Hathaway must be avenged at all cost.

They were still sitting there when a cab paused at the door, and a lady alighted. Margaret Hathaway looked hastily at her son. Her heart told her who this prospective visitor was.

Ralph's face was pale, and he made two efforts to speak before he succeeded.

"You must receive her; I cannot," he finally said. "Say that I am occupied—ill—anything. I cannot see her now!"

He rose, moved out of the room and ascended the stairs just as the door-bell rung.

Margaret Hathaway was far from calm, and she would gladly have avoided this interview, but she was a woman who would make any sacrifice for the sake of one she loved. She answered the ring; the door swung back, and she and Claudia were face to face.

The young wife had expected that Ralph's mother would answer her summons, and when she saw this tall, pale lady she felt sure it was so. More than this, much of the apprehension she had felt faded away. There was that in Margaret Hathaway's face that told of patient kindness, even though no encouraging light was then visible.

"Is Ralph in?" the visitor hesitatingly asked.

Mrs. Hathaway would not tell a falsehood. She briefly answered affirmatively.

"Will you tell him I would like to see him?"

"I do not think he will see you. He bade me say that he was not at home to any one."

"But—do you know who I am?"

It was growing harder for Claudia to speak, for the elder woman's face was cold and discouraging.

"I think I do."

Still the discouraging look; still the discouraging inflection of voice. Claudia began to feel embarrassed, troubled, doubtful. She hesitated, and then broke a painful pause.

"Has Ralph told you anything to-day which surprised you, Mrs. Hathaway?"

"He has told me all. Not to waste words I will admit that I know you to be Archibald Woodside's daughter. I am sorry that you cannot see Ralph, but this unfortunate affair has prostrated him. He has gone to his room and denied himself to all."

Claudia's face expressed so many emotions that her companion could not tell which predominated, but, after a short pause, she answered in a voice of unexpected firmness:

"Then I must see you. Will you invite me in?"

They had remained standing in the hall, for Mrs. Hathaway hoped the caller would soon go, but the steady voice had a tinge of imperiousness in it which one like the elder woman could not well resist.

Feeling herself compelled to yield, she did so

courteously and gracefully, and they were soon seated in the front room.

Claudia was beginning to feel some resentment, and she now proceeded straightforwardly.

"I suppose you are aware that I am Ralph's wife," she said, with calm dignity.

"Yes."

"I have come to hear the explanation which Ralph sought of you. I expected to hear it from him."

"I have explained why he cannot see you."

Mrs. Hathaway felt that her course was small and ignoble, and Claudia held the same opinion, though she did not say so. She felt the coldness of the elder woman's manner, and her nature arose against the slight that was being put upon her. She was calm outwardly, but, really, her heart seemed to lie like lead in her bosom. Had Ralph refused to see her? Was fresh trouble in store for them?

She answered the last remark in a steady voice:

"Then perhaps you will speak for him. I wish to know the cause of my father's objections, and—if there is hope."

Her voice wavered a little at the close, and Margaret Hathaway's heart echoed the pain of her own. Why, the mother wondered, was this fair girl called upon to suffer for another's sin?

"I regret that I can tell you nothing, at present."

"Why not?"

"It is no more than right that you should go to your father for information."

"He has given you permission to speak."

"And I give him the same permission."

"He will not do so. It is clearly my right to hear the truth from some one."

"You had better forego the right."

"Why?"

Claudia was altogether too straightforward for Mrs. Hathaway, who began to be afraid of her.

"Because there is too much pain and sorrow in the past."

"I am willing to forgive—overlook—all."

"But I am not!"

Mrs. Hathaway could not withhold the words, and they were so vehement and bitter that they frightened even her. She saw Claudia grow more grave and troubled.

"There is much about this affair which I do not understand," the young wife said, after another pause, "but I feel that I have a right to know. I am Ralph Hathaway's wife. Why does he not see me? If he is ill, my place is by his side, I must ask you to go and tell him that I am here."

"He knows it, already."

"He does? And has he refused to see me?"

Mrs. Hathaway had said too much. She knew it when the last words were, metaphorically speaking, shot at her, and her answer was not ready.

"What have I done that Ralph refuses to even see me?" Claudia pursued, with emphasis. "I thought the objection all against him, but you intimate that it is not. What crime have I committed?"

"None, I sincerely believe, but—"

"But what?"

"Oh! my dear young lady, I beg that you will not ask for an explanation now. You are making the scene painful for us both, for I feel for you most sincerely. I am sorry that you should suffer for another's sin. If I could see the way clear I would help you, but I cannot. All I can do now is to ask you to wait patiently for an explanation."

"Until when?"

"I don't know, as yet."

"It is too indefinite, too unsatisfactory, and I cannot comply with any such request. Ralph Hathaway had no right to make me his wife, and then so soon decline to see me, simply because of something that occurred in the past. I decline to accept the fate marked out for me. I will not leave here until I see my husband!"

And Claudia removed her hat and placed it on the table in a manner as inexorable as the inflection of her firm voice.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DETECTIVE FACES DEATH.

DUKE DORGAN found that he had calculated well in regard to the time necessary to reach the court where Abe Benlow lived, and where he was to meet Peters. He reached this region of age, decay, dirt and crime with punctuality which would have brought him at once near his fellow-detective had the latter been equally prompt.

Peters, however, was not visible.

There were so many loafers around that Duke did not feel at all afraid of attracting attention by making one of the ornaments of the place, and he had made himself up so that his superior respectability did not show at that hour in the ill-lighted court.

His rags did, however, and he seemed a bird of their own feather.

Half an hour he waited, and then had his reward; Peters appeared, moving at a quick pace.

He made his way through the loafers, and toward the house where Abe Benlow lived. As

before, the door was unlocked, and he at once entered. So did some one else. Bold measures had helped Duke Dorgan once before, and he was not going to be timid now. He followed as close after Peters as he dared.

Everything seemed as usual in the house, and he moved up the stairs. Then he saw that both hall doors were closed. This did not look so favorable, but after listening a moment at the first, he decided that no one was inside.

Accordingly, he turned the knob and passed carefully through.

Everything appeared the same as on the former occasion, and he could hear nothing but the sound of voices from the other room. These showed that Peters and Benlow were in conference, and he glided to the connecting passage.

The two men were at the same old table, and, as usual, Abe was drinking beer, but the bargain did not seem to be prospering amicably. Peters looked angry, while Abe was talking doggedly.

"I ain't necessary ter argue the p'int at all," he said. "The long an' short on't is that I don't see fit ter trade with you. I've a right ter do ez I see fit, ain't I?"

"But you promised that if I brought the money you would tell," urged Peters.

"Don't keer a durn ef I did," growled Abe.

"See here, my man, what other scheme have you in mind?"

"What other scheme?"

"Yes."

"W'ot d'ye mean?"

"Simply that I know your way, and you would never throw away a chance to make money unless you saw a better thing. Have you been paid by Professor Woodside to keep silent?"

Peters spoke sharply, menacingly, and Abe's face showed some dismay and a good deal of sullen anger.

"W'ot rubbish be you talkin' now? Who's yer professor, an' w'ot for should he pay me?"

"Oh! come, old man, don't try the innocent dodge. I know what I am talking about. Perhaps you think I don't know you were over to see old Woodside, and nearly got kicked out."

"By the Old Nick, Bob Bent has squealed!" said the ruffian, bringing his hand down heavily on the table.

"Oh! you were there, eh?"

"You know I was. I seen Bob thar, marchin' round with his head up in the air like a turkey-gobbler, dressed like a Fifth Avenue dude, an' lookin' so sweet at ther gal. Wal, I was thar. What on't?"

"Simply this: old Woodside has paid you not to talk to me."

"That's a lie!"

"Then you think you can make him pay."

Abe could not avoid a look of annoyance, and Peters smiled in a disagreeable way and added:

"So you mean to play the traitor, do you? When I have made you a good offer, and given you a chance to share in my pickings, you are only ungrateful and go looking for a chance to betray me, do you? That's your style, is it?"

"W'ot if 'tis?" growled Abe defiantly.

"Simply this: I won't have it!"

"You won't?"

"I will not."

"Curse you fur a fool, you can't help it. Who the blue blazes are you that you should dictate ter me? I'll hev you understand that I shall do jest ez I see fit, an' I'll thump the head off'n the man who says any different."

Abe was a very warlike-looking person in his wrath, and he looked quite capable of crushing Peters, but the latter sat unmoved with a quiet smile on his face.

"Take it easy, Abe, old boy," he coolly advised. "You have no cause to kill—I am the man with a wrong to avenge, and you're the infernal traitor I am after. No, don't double up those hams you call your fists; if you offer to lay a hand on me, I'll put a bullet through your thick head. I hold the advantage here, and—"

He suddenly ceased speaking, and stamped his foot heavily upon the floor.

Instantly there was a racket in the passage-way, and a moment later a knot of human flesh, which looked like several men wound up together, circled into the room and went spinning about in a bewildering way, showing here and there an arm, and somewhere else a leg, but presenting no definite aspect.

Peters and Abe gazed in surprise, but the human knot suddenly surged their way, struck the table and knocked it over with Abe beneath it.

The table went to pieces, crushed by the heavy weight, and Abe howled with pain and wrath, but the fight went on. Peters comprehended the situation, and gave a hand, and after a brisk skirmish order was restored and the fight ended.

And this was the result:

On the floor lay Abe Benlow, with a leg broken or badly wrenched, and beside him was Duke Dorgan, bound hand and foot.

"What the dickens does this mean, and whom have we here anyhow?" Peters asked, in surprise.

"Some pal o' Benlow's," said one of the panting victors. "He sneaked inter the passage jest arter you began to chin with Abe, an' we seen he was some pal o' his'n an' took him in."

"An' he fit like a demon," said man Number Three.

"Curse him, yes. What shall we do with him, boss? Say the word, an' he's a gone goose."

Deep Duke looked at the trio of merciless faces about him—two of them were those of as hardened-looking ruffians as he ever saw—and knew that he had inadvertently put his head into a deadly noose.

He had made such a gallant fight that it had required the combined efforts of the three to overpower him, but the odds had been too great in the end.

Now he could only bear his fate philosophically.

Abe had ceased his lugubrious groans, and, with a vicious glitter in his eyes, was working his hand around to his pocket, but Peters suddenly sprung forward and seized his hand.

"No, you don't, my hearty. No revolver practicing allowed here. Your little game is up."

Abe looked at one of the other men with a most malevolent glare.

"Curse you, Sam Loonsby, you've turned ag'in me, but I'll hev yer blood fur it?"

"Who's the traitor?" asked Peters, scornfully.

"When I learned your little game with old Woodside I determined to play you card for card, and when I told your landlord what a sneak you were, he agreed to help me. Sam is all right. We laid a trap for you, and when you refused to keep your word and talk, we sprung it. But we did not expect to catch your pal."

"I'm no pal of his," said the detective.

"Tell that to the marines. Sam, hadn't we better yank them away before we get dropped on?"

"Yes; down with them at onc't."

As he spoke Sam opened a door which one would have supposed led to a side-room, but revealed a dark stairway beyond. Down this the prisoners were dragged with a want of ceremony which brought many a groan and curse from Abe, until the cellar was reached.

Here a light was obtained, and the captives bound to a huge box which seemed to have once been a refrigerator. It was now fastened to the upright posts that supported the floor above, and had been pierced with holes through which the ropes were run.

Duke Dorgan was by no means pleased with the turn affairs had taken, and he voiced his disapproval emphatically.

It was only a waste of words; his protests were thrown away.

"You had no business to go into partnership with Abe," said Peters, though Duke had just declared that he had never spoken with the injured man. "I've reached a point in this game where decisive action is necessary, and you shall see my style."

"An' the style o' this place," added Sam.

"Just so. Abe knows the uses this cellar is put to, but, maybe, you don't. I'll tell you. This is where we fix our drowned rats. By a contrivance of our own we can let the water into this cellar until it is full. We only do this when we have men tied to this box—you can guess what becomes of the men."

"Ef he can't, I'll tell him," added Sam. "You see, I don't a'prove o' killin' men in a way that'll leave marks that may hang us gents. By lettin' in the water we drown our game, an' then run 'em inter the sewer. Be you on?"

He punched Duke facetiously in the ribs, but the latter could see no joke about the matter. The ruffians were plainly in earnest, and there seemed to be no hope of rescue in that lawless place.

Every cry they uttered would be deadened by the cellar and distance, and the rising of the water around them would soon end their lives. For the first time in his life Dorgan was in a dangerous trap, and it bade fair to be the last.

The ruffians finished their preparations and went up-stairs, and then came the sound of falling water.

The fatal step had been taken, and the helpless prisoners could only await their fate. Death seemed inevitable.

CHAPTER XIII

SWEPT TO DESTRUCTION.

DEEP DUKE had preserved his calmness through all his experience with his lawless captors. Even his temper was kept under control. While Abe Benlow raved and cursed he maintained his dignity, and certainly lost nothing thereby.

All his efforts to convince Peters and his friends that he was not an ally of Benlow proved useless, however. It did not occur to them why he had actually been there, and his rough dress was a disguise which Peters did not penetrate.

They would have it that he was Abe's ally, and he was handed over to the same fate marked out for that disreputable individual.

Perhaps it was just as well; it is not likely that he would have fared any better had his real character been known.

The first rush of the water as it fell into the cellar was greeted by Abe with a groan.

"It's all up with us now!" he said.

"Is the situation as bad as they say?" Dorgan coolly asked.

"Yes; I know this place o' old. The sullen is small, an' the stream o' water they hev let on will soon flood it. An' we hev got ter set here an' be drowned like rats."

Bitterness and despair were in the man's voice; it was plain that he had no hope.

"Will they really let the matter go on to the end?"

"You bet. Peters has got too much at stake ter give me any show."

"So you were really going to treat with Woodside, were you?"

There was a momentary silence. In the darkness Duke could not even see his companion's face, but his manner when he did speak proved that Abe felt the force of the question.

"W'ot do you know about the case?" he growled, surlily.

"Everything. I told Peters the truth, as you know, when I said I was not your pal. I might have added that I was no friend of his. I knew him of old—a sneaking private detective he is."

"You're right, hoss," Abe viciously replied, adding a curse on Peters's head. "I've helped him some, but if I could get out o' this I'd make him howl."

"I feel the same way. Say, partner, ain't there some way to make him squirm on this Woodside case? Seems that he's playing fast and loose there, and up for sale to the highest bidder."

"He always is. Call him a detective! He's only a miserable blackmailer—that's what he is!"

Abe spoke with as much righteous indignation as though he had not fallen into his present trouble by deciding to desert Peters, and blackmail the professor on his own responsibility.

"What is it about Woodside?" asked Duke, seeing that the iron was hot. "He was once a fellow-convict of yours, wasn't he?"

"Yes."

"Where was this?"

Abe hesitated, and then answered:

"Charlestown, Massachusetts."

"What was he in for?"

"Stealin' a hoss."

"He was also wanted for murder, I believe."

"Yes, but the cops was just a bit too late. They thought ter arrest him at prison when his time was up, but they made a blunder an' was a day or two late. Arch had gone, and I reckon they never struck the trail ag'in."

"Whom did he kill?"

"I dunno. It was a job in New York, an' he then fled to Maine, som'ers. He lived a crooked life ther, an' finally had ter light out. Officers pressed him sharp an' he stole a hoss ter git away on, but he was took as hoss-thief an' jugged."

"Was he sentenced under the name of Archibald Woodside?"

"Yes, though he didn't use that name in Maine."

"What name did he use there?"

"See hyar, I reckon I'm tellin' too much. Meracles do occur sometimes, an' we may git out. Peters sez the old chap hez a deserted wife lookin' arter him, an' I reckon I'll keep my tongue still. I was a fool ter tell so much. Hello! the water is hyar!"

The last words were sharply uttered, for Abe felt a dampness about his feet which was not to be mistaken. The water had been falling steadily ever since their captors left, and in a large stream. The bottom of the cellar was now flooded, and more had entered than seemed to be there, the prisoners being on the highest part of the floor.

"The ruling passion is said to be strong even in death, and Duke Dorgan had put every other thought aside in his anxiety to question Abe."

He now turned his attention to another matter.

Was there any hope of escape?

He gave a stout pull at his bonds, but it only caused the cords to sink deeper into his wrists. They held firm. He then threw his strength so as to test the firmness of the refrigerator.

Once more he saw no good result.

"It's no use," said Abe, mournfully. "Them fellers know how to do their work, an' we might ez well try ter raise the house."

"Are you reconciled to die here?"

"Don't make any difference whether I be or not. We're in fur it, you see."

The detective gave the box another wrench. He, at least, was far from being reconciled.

"The cowards!" he uttered, fiercely.

"Shall we yell?" asked Abe.

"Yell?"

"Yes. Somebody may hear us, though the chances are awfully ag'in' it. Every nook and crack is stopped up so that nobody kin hear what is said in this pit."

"I don't suppose anybody in this part of the city would care a red for all the yelling we might do, anyhow. We may as well save our breath. But, see here—what becomes of the water after the cellar is flooded?"

"They lets it off inter the sewer."

"Ah!"

"An' the corpses go with it, an' when they are found nobody thinks a murder has been did."

Sam is an old bird, an' 'twas him that connected the place with the sewer."

A brief silence followed, during which the water steadily. It had crept rose up until it reached a point half-way to their knees, and it seemed to be coming in more rapidly than ever.

The rush and plunge at the side of the cellar frightened Abe nearly out of his senses.

"This is terrible!" he said, with a shiver.

"Your friend, Peters, is not the noble man you thought him, eh?"

"Curse him! I'd like my liberty for awhile. I'd make him sick!"

"If we get out of this I'll see that you have revenge—that is, if you will obey me."

"I will. I'll do anything you say."

"I only hope we may have the chance."

But the prospects of such a chance were very few and small. Struggle as they might, and did, their bonds held firm, and the remorseless water rose higher every moment.

Dorgan had been through so many dangers that his nerves were remarkably good, but he could not help acknowledging that their situation was desperate. Peters certainly would not relent, and, unable to help themselves, they were cut off from the rest of the world.

In strong contrast to their situation was that of the men above. They were waiting for their victims to drown. When the proper time came they would have to raise a gate and let out the water in the cellar—and with it the bodies of their victims.

Until then they proposed to make merry.

Sam had brought out a bountiful supply of beer, and they were drinking as happily as though they had not doomed two fellow-men to violent death.

In this way considerable time passed, but their carousal ended in a way not expected by them. Sam suddenly paused with his glass half lifted to his mouth, set it down suddenly and then looked at his companions in surprise.

"What is it?" Peters asked.

"I thought—yes, by the Old Nick, the water is escapin'. Hyar that?"

They did hear it—a sort of rushing, roaring noise, and Sam, at least, knew the meaning.

"Either somebody has raised the gate, or the darned thing has gi'n way!" he explained, as he sprung to his feet and hurried from the room.

The others followed dim, and were led to the rear of the house. Here the rushing sound was even more distinct, and they were not surprised when Sam, after thrusting his hand into what seemed to be a closet, angrily exclaimed:

"Yes, the blamed gate has busted."

"What could have caused it?"

"Pressure o' water. You see, the thing was gettin' old an' rotten. I ought ter 'a' had it strengthened afore this, but I kep' puttin' it off."

"Do you suppose the men are drowned?" Peters anxiously asked.

"Oh! yes; they're gone, sure enough, though it don't make much difference. They would never live through the suction o' that water. It's wuss than the rapids o' a river. Ther draft is sech that a man is drawn in like a feather, an' handled jest as bad. He can't get through alive; by the time he reaches the sewer he would be churned all ter pieces."

"All is lovely, then."

"You bet. Jest hear the water roar! It's rushin' out like a house on fire."

There did, indeed, seem to be a great commotion in the cellar, but it gradually subsided, and they knew that the water had become so low that there was no longer a resistless suction.

Five minutes longer they waited, and then Sam opened the door through which they had come up and, armed with a light, they descended to the cellar. All the water had disappeared that would flow out, only a few shallow pools remaining on the hard ground which formed the cellar bottom.

Sam looked about and found his opinion confirmed on one point. On former occasions, when he let the water off, he had a contrivance by which the suction at the point of the refrigerator was lessened. As this had not been in use this time he knew that great force had been exerted upon it, and doubted if it had withstood it.

Nor was he wrong. The refrigerator had been almost torn away from its fastenings, and the two men he had left bound to it had disappeared.

He flashed his light around and soon satisfied himself that they were not in the cellar.

"That settles them," he said, cheerfully.

"Are you sure they are dead?" Peters asked.

"Sure? Of course I be. Nothin' could go through there alive. Look fur yerself."

He held the light and Peters looked beyond the gate. Strong-nerved as he was, he shivered at what he saw. The passage which led to the sewer was lined with large, rough rocks, and he could well believe that any human being swept upon them would be instantly crushed to death.

Such, no doubt, had been the fate of Dorgan and Benlow, if by any chance they had passed the gateway alive.

"I'm satisfied!" he said, with a dark smile.

"They are forever out of the way, and now I

can prosecute a certain enterprise I have in my mind without fear of opposition. Victory shall be mine!"

CHAPTER XIV.

TROUBLE FOR THE PROFESSOR.

MARGARET HATHAWAY changed color and looked as deeply pained as she really was when Claudia so firmly declared that she would not leave the house until she had seen Ralph.

There was not a particle of ill-feeling in the widow's heart. She was not a believer in the idea of visiting the sins of the parent on the child, and though she regarded the marriage of Claudia and Ralph as a most deplorable affair, she was just enough to see that Claudia would be the heaviest sufferer.

Fate, in Mrs. Hathaway's opinion, had decreed that Archibald Woodside should be punished through his daughter, regardless of the fact that the sword of retribution would be double-edged.

Nevertheless, when Claudia took her bold stand, the elder lady felt very much distressed for Ralph, and began to blame the young wife somewhat.

"I don't think Ralph will come down," she said.

"Why shouldn't he?" Claudia promptly asked.

"He is ill—overwhelmed—"

"Then my place is by his side."

"Really, I think you are inconsiderate."

"Is it wrong for a wife to wish to see her husband when he is in trouble?"

"But you don't understand—"

"What?"

"His trouble."

"It is certainly my right to understand it, and that is why I insist upon it."

Mrs. Hathaway felt herself overpowered. She was not accustomed to deal with such strong-minded people. Claudia, when in earnest, had a way of carrying all before her, and the pale widow felt like a feather on the stream.

"Well, I will speak to him."

"Pray do so."

So Mrs. Hathaway went out, and Claudia waited in fear and trembling. Brave as she was outwardly she could not control her woman's heart, and she felt almost numb in the presence of this undefined trouble. What had Ralph learned which had caused him to deny himself to his bride of a day?

Her courage did not increase as she waited, for the delay showed that either Ralph was not coming at all, or else he was very reluctant; but, at last, just as the suspense was growing almost unbearable, double footsteps were heard, and Mrs. Hathaway returned with Ralph.

The latter was pale to a degree which startled Claudia, but, whatever his previous plans may have been, he was unable to resist the impulses of his heart.

He advanced and kissed his bride, though in utter silence.

"Are you ill?" Claudia faltered.

"I am ill at heart," was the unsteady reply.

"I—I hope you will not blame me for not coming at once."

"I certainly shall not until I know the reason."

Ralph glanced at his mother, but made no reply.

"Have I offended you?" Claudia continued.

"You? Never! No, my dear girl, you certainly have done no wrong—such a thing is impossible. It is all because of that affair of the past. What it was, I beg that you will not ask now. I am about overwhelmed, and incapable of thinking calmly. I do not wish to seem unkind, but if you will give me time to meditate I shall be glad. Let me mark out my course—then I will see you again."

Claudia was looking at him with a world of expression and feeling in her dusky eyes.

"Is it as bad as that?" she asked, anxiously.

"Yes."

"But—there is hope?"

A few minutes before Ralph had told himself there was none, but he now set his teeth for a moment and then replied:

"Yes, there is hope—there shall be hope."

"But you don't wish to explain now?"

"No. Believe me, I have good reason. Give me a little time, and then you shall know all."

"I am content with that," said Claudia, whose heart, if not her head, compelled her to yield her part. "Only, you won't refuse to see me again?"

"No, no; never. You are always welcome—always."

"Then I will not lose hope."

The skies seemed brightening, but Claudia felt that it would be better for her to go. There was that in Ralph's manner which told her so, and she delayed no longer. Ralph followed her to the door, and parted with her tenderly.

"Be of good cheer," he said. "I am sure that all will yet be well."

But when she was gone the wretched man returned to the sitting-room and dropped heavily into a chair.

"All will be well after death; I hope for nothing before then!" he said.

Claudia went home like one in a painful dream. She could not understand the matter

at all, and the shadow of mystery was so at variance with her straightforward, practical nature that she felt incapable of forming an opinion or combating the invisible foe.

She felt sure that Ralph must have learned something terrible about his father, for in no other way could she understand his peculiar course.

Her trials were not yet at an end.

When she reached home a servant informed her that Professor Woodside wished to see her at once in his study. She obeyed the summons, but was somewhat surprised to find Horace Wilberson there, also.

"Claudia," said the professor, abruptly, Mr. Wilberson has honored us by asking my permission to seek your hand in marriage. I have informed him that I do not approve of such a thing, but I am willing to leave the matter entirely to you. It is for you to decide, at once."

Wilberson started up at the last words.

"Mr. Woodside," he exclaimed, "I must protest against the lady giving an answer now."

"Is she not capable?"

"She undoubtedly is capable, but this is no time or place for—"

"An offer of marriage?"

"Exactly."

"Love ought to burn at all seasons," Woodside dryly observed.

"I must affirm, sir, that your course is outrageous," declared the would-be lover, his face very red. "You are treating me with disdain, and seeking to mortify me. No gentleman would do as you have done."

"Mr. Wilberson," was the cool, moderate reply, "I will trouble you to remember the beginning of this interview. You asked for Miss Woodside's hand. I told you I did not approve of the union, and when you demanded an answer, informed you that I had discovered you to be a dissipated person, as well as a gambler. You became angry and declared that I was not the man to put on airs, and that I ought to feel honored if an honest man offered to marry into my family—you remember the emphasis, don't you, Mr. Wilberson?"

Horace was glowering at the cool, unconcerned speaker, gnawing his lips and showing himself in very bad temper.

"Yes," he now replied, curtly.

"Having insulted me thus in my own house, can you complain of my course?"

A sudden change came over Wilberson. He had been very indiscreet to use the words to which the professor objected, but had reason to believe it would not make so very much difference. He had tried hard to favorably impress Claudia, but had never seen an atom of hope for himself. Probably it would come to a pitched battle in the end, anyhow—it might as well come now as ever.

He smiled in a wolfish way.

"You are at liberty to take whatever course you see fit, sir. As for me, I can prove all that I have alleged. No man of finical disposition, knowing you as I do, would be willing to enter your family."

Was it fancy, or did a slightly troubled expression appear on Woodside's face?

"Empty talk!" he observed.

"Yes! Now, I wonder—I really do wonder, dear old friend, if you would say this if I were to ask you where you were twenty years ago?"

Silence!

Yes; Professor Woodside had nothing to say. He sat there and stared blankly at Wilberson, and his fingers worked nervously on the arm of his chair.

The younger man smiled more broadly, and added:

"Twenty years ago, sir; twenty years ago."

The professor brought his clinched hand down on the table forcibly.

"Sir," he retorted, "it is none of your business where I was."

"Oh! but the law. What of that?"

"The law?"

"That's what I said."

"I don't know what you mean."

"There are none so blind as those who won't see."

"Father," exclaimed Claudia, with spirit, "if I were you, I would inform this person that he is not wanted in this house!"

"Ah! but he dares not," said Wilberson, coolly.

The professor started to his feet.

"Dare not!" he echoed, impetuously. "Who are you who says this in my own house? You shall see what I dare do. Yonder is the door, sir, and the sooner you pass through it, never to return, the better you will please me. Go!"

Wilberson smiled.

"Ah! but I shall return," he said. "I shall come to humble you!"

The professor gave the bell a furious ring, and as a servant chanced to be passing, he almost immediately appeared.

"Show this man the door!" ordered the master of the house, "and if he refuses to go, help him out. You can send his baggage after him."

"Oh, I'll go fast enough," the younger man serenely replied. "I expected long ago that it would come to this. You have said where I

out by Sam Loonsby to his companions were reached, and the box rattled over them with a succession of bumps which tore the wood and started the joints.

Only that Dorgan was bound to it, and that that particular side did not chance to turn down, these rocks would have taken his life; as it was, he was saved from another danger.

Not so easily did the box escape. Beaten and buffeted, not only by the stones but by the water, it suddenly went to pieces like a toy house, and then each piece went skurrying away by itself.

And Dorgan?

When the collapse came it freed him from the box, and he also discovered that his wrists were no longer bound together. Instantly the instinct of self-preservation came to his aid, and he struck out with the skill of a strong, experienced swimmer.

For once he wasted his efforts; the water was by that time running in a smoother channel, but it went with resistless force which took him along with it. He could hear a muffled roar just ahead, and, remembering the mention of a sewer, suspected that he would soon be dashed into this.

Wishing to avoid such a mishap he redoubled his efforts, and had just moved to the side of the temporary stream when he felt his legs going over some sort of a fall.

He flung out both hands, trying to grasp something, but utterly failed to do so. Down, down he went—but only for a few feet. Suddenly his descent was stopped by a shock which gave his right arm and shoulder a wrench as though the one was being torn from the other, and then there he hung like ripe fruit on a tree.

For a moment he was unable to account for his position, but as he felt the strain on his arm he knew that he was hanging by that alone, and, raising his left hand, he discovered the truth.

When his bonds were broken, a noose remained tight around his right wrist, with a piece of cord dangling beyond, and it was that cord which had caught upon something and suspended him where he now was.

Dorgan soon discovered that the cord was over a pointed stone, and was about to draw himself up when a light showed in the direction from which he had come. He realized that the men who had doomed him to death were moving, and he took good care not to get into sight until Sam and his friends had finished their search.

Then he drew himself up to where he could sit down.

He felt lame and sore after his late experience, but was not materially injured. He could not say as much about Abe Benlow. That person had disappeared, and as Sam had not found him in the cellar, it was evident that he had gone into the sewer.

Whether he was dead or alive the detective did not know.

Dorgan now began to consider his own position. What was he to do next? Only two ways seemed open to him—to go into the cellar or down the sewer—and neither idea pleased him.

Was there not some other way?

He could see that the cavity where he was sitting extended to the right, and he determined to follow and see where it would lead. He could not be more than ten or fifteen feet below the surface of the ground, and some opportunity to escape might be vouchsafed him. At any rate, it was worth a trial.

He moved along a muddy, disagreeable way, investigating as he went; but, instead of rising, as he hoped, the passage steadily descended, and he found himself sinking knee-deep in mud and water at every step. The earth above him, too, crumbled and fell in lumps as he went, and a new fear assailed him.

What if it should cave in and bury him alive? "Ugh!" he muttered, "I've had enough of this. It seems utter folly to follow this passage, and it would make a wretched grave. What was that? A rat, and I should say he was as big as a cat. I've had enough, sure as I live. I'll turn back, and I am going out through that house, though I'm not in very presentable shape for the street."

This was a fact, for he was wet through.

He retraced his steps and soon stood in the cellar. Sam and his friends had gone above again, and there was no one to oppose him, but the darkness was something remarkable. It seemed to him he had never been in a more dismal place.

After some delay he found the stairs and was about to ascend when he heard footsteps above. He paused. Then the latch of the cellar-door rattled, and Dorgan promptly sought refuge under the stairs.

He did not care for a fight with any of the roughs, for Sam and his gang had left him no weapons.

Nevertheless, the door opened, and a light shone faintly on the stairs. Duke glanced up and saw an old man peering down—a vicious-looking fellow to whom old age had brought no chastening or ennobling element of character. This man hobbled down the stairs, showing that he had a lame leg, and soon stood on the ground, only a few feet from the detective. He held his light high above his head and looked around.

"Nobody here!" he then said, in a squeaking voice. "They have gone, an' now old Daddy

Posey will look for the sparklin' boys. Ha! ha! Daddy Posey reaps what they sow. Ha! ha!"

It was a most unmelodious voice, but he seemed to be in excellent spirits, and at once crouched down and began moving across the cellar with his lamp well down and his eyes eagerly scanning the ground.

Deep Duke was puzzled to know what he was after, but as it seemed scarcely safe to ascend the stairs while he was there, he contented himself with watching.

The old man reached the center of the cellar, and then suddenly sprang forward and picked up something small but bright.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed, "here's one o' the sparklin' boys! They shakes 'em out when they go—they do, an' ole Daddy Posey gits 'em. Ha! ha!"

By this time the detective had discovered what had been picked up; it was a ten or five-cent coin; and this, together with the last words, enabled him to get a clew to the situation. "Daddy Posey" was after money, and it seemed that he had expected it after the going out of the flood. Possibly he had reaped many a harvest when Sam thus disposed of his victims. What fell from their pockets the old man took.

Duke did not care for whatever coins might be scattered around, but he had a new idea. He was in condition anything but fit for the street, with his wet, muddy clothes, and as he saw that the old man had on a loose coat which, though old, looked clean, he made up his mind that Daddy Posey must exchange with him.

The old man would get the best of the bargain in one sense, but the detective would get something which he could wear on the street.

Acting on this plan, Duke glided forward, but it was not until he laid a hand on the old man's shoulder that the latter knew of his proximity. Then Daddy wheeled with a yelp which was probably intended for a cry of alarm.

The detective towered before him and held up one hand warningly.

"Quiet, my man, quiet! You and I need have no trouble if you are wise, but if you kick up a row, we'll have the biggest circus that ever played the cyclone."

"It's none o' yer business ef I be here!" said Daddy, evidently a good deal excited.

"I'm glad you are here."

"Eh?"

"I don't care a cent how much you mouse around here, my good man."

Daddy glared at him suspiciously.

"You're up ter mischief," he muttered.

"Wrong! You see, I'm not one of the gang that broods in this ranch, and you may pick up all the 'sparklin' boys' you can find. I don't care. What I want may be told in a very few words. First, I want to swap coats with you; secondly, I want you to conduct me safely to the court."

Posey's eyes began to glitter, and he showed his few remaining teeth in an evil way.

"I won't do either!" he declared.

"Yes, you will."

"I won't!"

Deep Duke had no time to waste there, where he might at any moment be discovered by the men who had once doomed him to death, and as it was plain that the old man was a rascal of the worst kind, the detective did not hesitate to employ rigorous measures.

Grasping the old wretch by the collar he glared at him in his fiercest way.

"You will do as I tell you, or you are a dead man!" he growled, as furiously as though he meant all he said.

Posey looked frightened, but raised his voice shrilly:

"Help! Hel—"

Just then Dorgan ran him against the wall and took a tighter grasp on his collar.

"If you are greedy to die, say so!" he exclaimed. "I can accommodate you, I reckon."

"No, no!" gasped the old fellow, badly scared by so fierce an attack. "I didn't mean any harm, an' I'll do jest ez you say."

"Will you screech again?"

"No."

"Will you exchange coats and guide me out safely?"

"Yes, yes! Don't kill me."

"I ought to kill you, but if you behave I will forego the pleasure it would give me. Now, off with that coat!"

"I paid five dollars for it," whined Daddy Posey.

"And I paid eight for the one I am giving you. Come, off with it at once."

Very reluctantly the old man obeyed, and the change was soon made.

"Now," continued Dorgan, "you are to guide me out. I am a peaceable man when well used, but I caution you against any treachery. If we meet anybody, introduce me as Dave Blivens, a friend of yours, and see that you do it politely. Do you understand?"

His manner was stern and sharp, and Daddy earnestly promised to do his part well. Then they ascended the stairs. Duke knew very well that his guide was no real protection, but he would not let him leave until the outside door was reached, for fear that he would at once give the alarm.

This Daddy did not intend to do under the circumstances. He had taken Duke's measure in his mind, and knew he was not a man with whom it was safe to trifle.

They were soon threading the narrow passages and small rooms which led to the court. It was a mean, poorly-lighted way, but the detective felt that all would be well unless Sam Loonsby, Peters and their allies appeared. If they did he was not in shape for a fight, for he did not have any weapon whatever.

He went on with his eyes and ears busy, watching the guide to see that he did not escape, and taking care that no assassin stole upon him unawares.

CHAPTER XVII.

A SURPRISE FOR SOMEBODY.

NOTHING occurred to disturb the quiet of the journey to the outer door. Daddy Posey did his work faithfully, and none of the gang who herded there appeared to oppose their departure. When Dorgan once more saw the open air he bade good-night to his guide, complimenting him on his common sense, but if he could have known all about the old man he would not willingly have parted with him then.

The court was nearly deserted, and as the detective crossed it with a free-and-easy swagger none of the loungers gave him particular attention.

They supposed him one of their own stripe.

Once on the street Dorgan lost no time in getting home, and, when there, he got rid of his drenched garments and donned dry ones as soon as possible.

The hour was late and he felt that a good night's rest was needed after his adventures, but he first went out and visited a telegraph office. From there he sent two telegrams. One was to the warden of the Charlestown, Massachusetts prison, and read as follows:

"Did you have a prisoner named Archibald Woodside, in 18—? If so, state crime and particulars."

The second, addressed to Chief of Police, Bangor, Maine, was in these words:

"Does the name of Zachary Rose, or Archibald Woodside, appear on your criminal list about 18—? If so, what particulars can you give?"

Having done this much to forward his cause, the detective went home and retired. He slept soundly, and, in the morning, read the answers to his telegrams at the breakfast-table. That from the Charleston prison-warden was brief:

"Archibald Woodside, sentenced for stealing a horse at Newburyport, served here from May 10, 18—, to October 1, 18—. We have no further record, nor does any one here remember the man."

Brief as this was it corroborated what Duke had learned, and proved that Sam Loonsby had told the truth in one respect about his old prison associate. The net seemed tightening about the professor.

The answer from the Bangor chief was somewhat longer, and read thus:

"Record shows that Zachary Rose was one of a gang of counterfeiters here in 18—. Said record is not complete enough for us to trace the man; nothing to show that he was arrested. A foot-note reads: 'Wanted by Detective Charles Cross, of New York, for suspected murder.' Rose lived at No. 6— street, and his wife is supposed to be still in Bangor, leading an honest life. Shall we investigate further for you?"

Dorgan read, meditated, and then went again to the telegraph office and sent this message:

"Should be very glad to locate some one, or more, of Zachary Rose's cronies at that date. Can you do this? No use to search for wife; she is not in Bangor. Answer!"

When this was done he left the office and was soon crossing the North River, en route to New York by Christopher street ferry. He had a well-defined object in view. Few names of the past were better known to him than that of the man mentioned in the dispatch as a detective—Charles Cross. He had retired like an old war-horse five years before, but Duke knew where to find him, and he went straight to his house on Jane street.

He was soon in the presence of the veteran, and after a brief preliminary conversation he came to business.

"Being aware, Mr. Cross, that you have a good memory, I want to ask you to recall one case to your mind."

"Mention it."

"It is the murder, or suicide of Temple Hathaway."

"Ha! you are back in the dim past."

"Confounded dim, I should say. Well, you worked on that case, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"May I ask with what result?"

"I became convinced that Hathaway was a suicide."

"Yet you searched for his assassin?"

"In a certain way, I did. Like many other officers I heard the Widow Hathaway's account of her husband's last hours, and her statement impressed me not a little. I argued that, while he might have told the facts at first to her, his mind had so failed, he being at the point of death, that he did not know what he was saying after she had brought witnesses. I thought there might be a case."

"So you took hold of it?"
 "Yes."
 "What was your first step?"
 "To find a man named Archibald Woodside, for he it was who, Hathaway alleged, first led the firm into considering a wild speculation, and then killed said Hathaway. There was one Archibald Woodside who was known, but it was absurd to suspect him—"

"Why so?"
 "Because he was a man of irreproachable character, and as little bent for business as I have for ballooning. I refer to the Professor Woodside of to-day."

"Then you did not turn your attention that way?"

"No. He had just sailed for Europe, and, besides, was not to be thought of in such a connection. I looked for another Archibald Woodside, and one who knew something about South America. From the nature of the business of Hathaway's firm, I argued that it was in such a direction that a business scheme must point for them to take hold of it."

"Did you find such a man?"

"Not at once. In fact, it was two or three years after when I read in a paper of the breaking up of a gang of counterfeiters in Bangor, Maine, and among the members of the gang mentioned was one Zachary Rose, alias Archibald Woodside, an ex-South American. This caught me at once, and I journeyed to Bangor, only to find that my bird had flown. Where he went to I don't know, and as I had before then lost faith in my case, owing to the fact that Hathaway's surviving partners denied all knowledge of Woodside, and that they were so respectable, I abandoned the chase. I've never heard of Woodside since."

"Did you never hear that he was arrested for stealing a horse after his flight?"

"No. Was such the fact?"

"So the Bangor police records state."

"They did not inform me, but they might not have learned of his arrest until somewhat later, when I had practically dropped out of sight and reach."

"True."

Deep Duke spoke absently. Two questions were in his mind. First, who were the men who had gone to the Massachusetts State Prison to arrest the horse-thief for murder, just one day too late? Secondly, why had Mrs. Rose been unable to state why her husband fled from Bangor, if the papers had been full of the crime, with his name therein?

The majority of women do not read criminal news, but, naturally, Mrs. Rose would have searched, when she knew her husband had been mixed up with some crime, and others were likely to have mentioned it to her, if they saw the account.

As for the first question, there seemed no way whatever of solving it just then. It occurred to Dorgan that Abe Benlow might have known more than he told, or have told more than was true, but Abe was not at hand to be questioned.

Very likely he was done with life.

Only one thing more did Cross say which was of interest to Duke. He spoke about going over the deserted quarters of the Bangor counterfeiters—a dilapidated old church, long out of use as such—and it gave the detective an idea.

Mrs. Rose's marriage-certificate was missing. Zachary had taken charge of it immediately after their marriage. If he had not destroyed it, what was more likely than that he had concealed it in the old church, either for safe-keeping, or with deliberate fraud in mind?

Dorgan determined to learn if this church was still standing. If it was, his visit to Cross might yet be productive of more good than appeared on the surface.

He did not try to convince Cross that Professor Woodside was not above suspicion, but, thanking him for what little he had told, took his departure and started for Jersey City again.

Duke's faith was not in the least shaken by the fact that a veteran like Cross had once decided that the professor was too eminently respectable to be investigated; in the opinion of the detective, no man was too lofty in life to be free from doubts.

He saw trusted public men going to the bad every day—why not Archibald Woodside?

"I may never connect him with the murder of Temple Hathaway," Dorgan thought, "but I propose to give Mrs. Rose a husband. That far I am going to succeed. As for the murder case, it would be far better for Claudia and Ralph if I could prove it groundless, rather than true. If true, their lives are ruined. But we will see."

By this time the ferryboat touched the Jersey side, and the detective stepped off briskly. Before he reached the street, however, a respectable-looking man approached him and nodded politely.

"Beg your pardon, but isn't this Mr. Dorgan?"

"That's my name, sir."

"I have come from Mrs. Rose, who wants to see you as soon as possible. I am her neighbor, and as she has struck a bit of a clew which promises much, I am helping her. I have a cab outside, and if you will go with me I'll take

you to her in a jiffy. She's at my sister's, on — street."

"All right. I was just going to her, anyway. Tell your Jebu to rattle along as fast as he pleases."

They had reached the cab and Dorgan entered, while his companion turned to the driver. He did not, however, give directions in regard to their speed, but shutting one eye significantly, he said in a low tone:

"He is in the trap!"

And then he entered the cab, sat down beside Dorgan and began talking briskly. He said that he did not know what Mrs. Rose's discoveries were, nor did he fully understand her case, but he believed her a fine little woman, and was glad to help her in any way.

The cab rattled along for nearly half an hour, and then drew up before a large wooden house which stood by itself in a somewhat spacious yard. The guide looked at it and waved his hand.

"My sister is watching for us," he said, smiling.

Duke Dorgan did not see the sister, nor did he care particularly for her. He followed the guide up the walk, and the latter then produced a key and they entered. Next, the detective was ushered into a large square room off the hall. Mrs. Rose was not visible, but two men sat at ease in their chairs and smiled at sight of him. No one spoke, however, and after a brief but awkward pause, Duke turned to the guide. The latter had closed the door and was standing with his back against it. He too was smiling.

"Where is Mrs. Rose?" the detective asked.

"Don't know!" was the brief reply, and then the two strangers laughed aloud.

"Don't know? What do you mean by that?"

"Well, Mr. Detective Man, to give it to you short and sweet, I mean just this: The woman ain't here, and hasn't been, but you are in a trap. We have decoyed you here to stop your infernal prying and peeking, and we're going to do it. Eh, boys?"

"You bet; and there'll be one less blamed detective on earth in about ten minutes!"

"Quite a surprise-party, Dorgan, ain't it?" added the treacherous guide.

"Not in the least!" was the detective's unexpected reply. "You must think me a fool to run my head into such a silly trap as this. I saw that I was followed all the way to Christopher Street Ferry, and that the spy watched me all the time I was on the boat, and I tumbled to your shallow trap the moment you appeared at the Jersey side. Perhaps you wonder why I came so tamely. It was simply because I wanted to look at the trappers and size up the trap. Now, gents, we are all here, so let's find out who is the best man!"

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CHAPTER XVIII.

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PROFESSOR WOODSIDE paused in astonishment and anger when he saw his visitors. He had been aroused from his studies and had scarcely heard a word that the servant said, and only comprehended that he had callers. Therefore, when he saw Wilberson, Peters and Mrs. Rose, it was a disagreeable surprise, to say the least.

Perhaps he saw only one of the party, for he looked only at Wilberson, but his pale face flushed with anger as he saw that the man he had forbidden the house was again in his parlor.

Peters opened his mouth to speak with easy confidence, but what occurred next was far from being what he had planned and desired. Without a word Woodside stepped quickly back out of the room, the door closed with a bang, and the visitors were once more alone.

For a moment Peters was speechless with surprise, and then he sprang toward the door.

"Devils alive!" he cried, "this won't work!"

He tore open the door, but was too late to intercept the professor. The hall was vacant. There he paused irresolutely, for he not only did not know where Woodside had gone, but it was a little too much to go searching for him over the house.

Wilberson came to his side.

"Dished, ain't we?" Horace inquired.

"By the fiends, no! I've come here on business, and am not to be frustrated. That old rascal shall come down off his high horse, or—"

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"Gentlemen," he said, "I am directed by my master to say that you are not wanted here."

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"He will be angry if I go back. He peremptorily ordered me to show you out at once," James replied.

"Young man, you go to your master and say that Eunice Rose and friends are here, and that we demand his presence before us in this parlor. Do you hear?"

Peters spoke slowly, but emphatically, and the troubled servant replied that he did hear. He retreated hesitatingly.

"Gentlemen," said Mrs. Rose, tremblingly, "I do not like this. He will be very angry."

"What of it? We did not come here to be bluffed."

"I don't believe he will give way."

"Don't you be afraid. He was playing a bluff, and when he finds that it won't work, he will go all to pieces. Here comes the servant—my word for it, he has brought a different answer this time. Well, James, is he coming?"

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Woodside had shown the iron hand with a vengeance, and there stood his stalwart servants to carry out his threat.

Plainly, it was a case where discretion was better than impudence and bravado, and Peters, though angry enough to draw a revolver and shoot down the men who stood between him and the professor, was not so incapable of reason as to defy the inevitable.

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Mrs. Rose gladly followed, and Wilberson brought up the rear, but not a word was spoken until they reached the street.

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"I'm going to ask for a warrant for Woodside's arrest!" Peters hissed.

"Slowly, my friend; you said an hour or so ago that you hadn't proof enough to expose your case."

"And I," interrupted Mrs. Rose, with unexpected firmness, "decline to take another step until I have seen Mr. Dorgan. Another scene like the one I have just experienced will drive me out of my senses!"

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"That's a fact," Wilberson added, seeing that his ally had some well-defined plan in view.

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"I had rather go home," said Mrs. Rose, faintly.

"Ah! but Dorgan may not think it best. In this emergency we need his long head."

"That's a fact," Wilberson added, seeing that his ally had some well-defined plan in view.

Mrs. Rose gave way, as she usually did when opposed, and a cab was hailed and they were soon rattling along over the pavement. Peters swallowed his anger to the best of his ability, assumed a light, confident air, and did his best to entertain Mrs. Rose on the trip. In a short time, if all worked well, he would have her where he could act as he saw fit, but, until then, he must use velvet touches and plausible words.

In due time they arrived at a plain, brick house, and there the cab was dismissed and they entered, Peters using a key which he produced from his pocket. He then escorted Mrs. Rose to a back parlor.

"Now I'll go and see if Duke is in," he said, in a pleasant voice. "I'll return directly. Will you go or stay?"

The last words were addressed to Wilberson, and as that worthy believed that he detected a hint, he followed Peters out. They were in the private detective's own home, and as he was only a boarder, Wilberson did not see how he was going to turn it into a prison.

Mrs. Rose, left alone, sat down by the window and looked out into the yard. The weather being warm the window was raised, and she soon became aware that the basement window, just below, was also open.

The sound of voices was distinct, and as she instinctively listened, the actual words became audible.

"No, sir," said the woman's voice, shrilly, "I am not going to turn my house into a prison to please anybody!"

"But I will pay you well," urged a masculine voice.

"About seven dollars a week, I suppose," was the sarcastic reply.

"Seven! You shall have fifteen dollars every week she is here."

There was a lull, and then the woman's voice came again, this time less sharply.

"Who is the woman? Some high-toned dame whose disappearance will kick up a big row?"

"No, no; she's poor as Job's turkey, and almost a stranger here. The reason I want her kept quiet is that she is a witness in a case I am on. She's up in the back parlor now; I've decoyed her here by a trick, and now I want you to keep her under lock and key for me."

Mrs. Rose waited to hear no more. She had heard enough to show Peters in his true colors, for she knew the voice was his, and she started to her feet. She was very pale and her trembling limbs scarcely sufficed to support her, but one idea was very distinct in her mind.

She was among desperate characters, and the sooner she left the house the better it would be for her.

Quickly she left the room and glided into the hall, but as she did so she stopped in consternation.

Wilberson was standing by the front door.

"Hallo!" he said, suspiciously "what's up?"

The little woman ran forward hurriedly and clasped her hands to him.

"Oh! sir," she exclaimed, "for the love of heaven, have mercy on me! What harm have I done that I should be brought to this place? I heard them talk in the basement, and I know they are going to shut me up here. Oh! sir, you look honest!"

"The game is up!" ejaculated Wilberson. "No, I won't let you out. You will stay here as long as we see fit, and do you mind your eye and keep quiet. Utter one screech and I will fix you. Come down-stairs to my partner!"

He grasped her roughly by the arm, and she almost swooned with terror.

"Mercy!" she gasped.

"Hush your noise!" he ordered. "Here we go down-stairs, and Peters can settle this."

He jerked open the door which led to the basement, but as he did so, he uttered a cry of alarm and recoiled so suddenly as to almost overturn Mrs. Rose. What startling surprise had met him there?

CHAPTER XIX.

DORGAN FACES THE DANGER.

NEVER were men more surprised than Duke Dorgan's enemies when the detective faced them with that bold defiance. They had imagined that they were drawing him into a snare of which he was wholly unconscious, and the turn of affairs dumfounded them.

There stood the man they had "trapped," as serenely confident as though he had an army at his back, and the revolvers which bore upon them did not waver in the least. Remarkably impressive Dorgan looked then, and they could only stare at him in silence.

"Come!" he added, after a pause, "what have you to say? This is not the way to entertain a welcome guest."

"Zounds!" muttered one of them, "you are a cool one."

"Oh! I'm warm-hearted enough, if you get me stirred up," Duke answered. "You look at me as though I were a wild animal in a cage. Suppose you send a small boy to punch me with a stick."

"You'll get punched, never fear."

"Send on the purcher."

"You are acting the clown now," said he

who had been the decoy, "but you will soon change your tune."

"I would like a change; I am burning with curiosity to know what you want of me. As I said before, I tumbled to your 'trap' right at the start, but an overpowering desire to learn who you were, and what you wanted, led me to come right along. Now that I am here I hope you will explain."

By this time the men were again themselves, and their crestfallen air gave place to one of confidence. They had caught a Tartar, but, as the odds were three to one in their favor, they felt sure of triumph. Dorgan's brief career of defiance would only make his downfall all the more bitter.

"We will explain," said the leader, "but I give you warning that our arguments are always made with powder and lead."

"That's just my style, too," the detective coolly replied. "There is nothing I enjoy more than a good revolver fight, and the sides are about equally matched in this case. But this isn't explaining your object in decoying me here."

"Our object is to get rid of an infernal, sneaking spy—yourself."

"Hello! In what way have I trod on your toes?"

"That's our business."

"Mine, too, isn't it?"

"We don't propose to explain, anyway. You don't deserve it. If there is a contemptible creature on the face of the earth it is a so-called detective—in plain words, a miserable sneak who goes around spying on his fellow-men."

Duke laughed aloud, as though he had heard a good joke.

"I have trod on your toes, haven't I? But how? Who are you? What have you done to fear me?"

"We don't fear you."

"No? You were afraid to have me at liberty."

"That's a different matter."

"All one, I assure you. Come, now, speak up like a little man, and tell me who you are, what misdemeanor you have committed, and why you thought necessary to take me off the trail?"

"We shall explain nothing."

"Then let me guess. A Jerseyman is cousin to a Yankee, anyhow, and I'm A1 on the guess. You are under the lead of one Levi Peters, private detective."

"Wrong. I never heard of the man."

Duke had relied more on his eyes than the man's veracity, and he was a trifle staggered when he saw that the decoyer not only spoke with all the honesty imaginable, but not a feature indicated annoyance or surprise. If he had told a lie it had been all ready, and did not care if the detective had made a close guess.

Dorgan saw fit to dispute the answer point blank, and then the decoyer indifferently observed that he was at liberty to think as he pleased. Correct or not, he did not seem to care in the least.

"This is not to the point, though," he added. "You make a fine show standing up there with your revolvers, but all your bluster don't amount to the peep of a sick chicken. We are three to one, and can blow you sky-high any time we see fit; but as we are peaceably disposed, I will make you a fair offer: Hand over your barkers, and surrender quietly, and we won't lay it up against you. All we want is to keep you prisoner just twenty-four hours, after which you can go free."

"Gammon!" tersely interrupted the detective.

"Don't you believe me?"

"No."

"You will save yourself trouble by complying."

"I see your hook too plainly under the bait. You know that as matters now stand I hold the reins, while, if I was fool enough to surrender my revolvers, you would have matters all your own way. You can't do it; I am going to arrest you, and take you to the station-house."

"The blazes you are!"

"Yes."

"Do you imagine you can arrest the three of us?"

"Certainly."

Dorgan spoke as coolly as though it was the simplest thing in the world, and the men were a good deal irritated by his confidence.

"Hang it!" exclaimed one of the others; "this has gone far enough. Let's shoot the cuss and—"

"Hold on!"

The previous speaker's hand had moved toward his pocket, but the detective's voice interrupted with an imperious ring which stopped him.

"The first man who tries to draw a weapon will be my target," Dorgan sternly added. "I advise you not to try it!"

The kidnapers looked at each other in silent consternation and wrath. They had heard of Duke Dorgan's prowess before, and as he stood before them, tall, strong, confident, sharp-eyed and commanding, they felt that it would be no trifling matter to dare his wrath and provoke a fight.

The spokesman, who proved to be named

Brown, now took up the conversation and tried to argue the point. They did not want to harm their "prisoner," but, if forced to extreme measures, they were not men to let human life stand in their way. If he would surrender quietly he would not be harmed, but if he persisted in defying them they would take necessary measures to subdue him, even though they had to kill him—and they were three to one.

"I don't care if you are fifty," Dorgan replied as confidently as ever; "I've often tackled greater odds than you show. Come, no words about this matter; get up and march to the police-station!"

"Not by a blamed sight!"

"Then I shall take you!"

And the detective advanced directly toward Brown.

He did not feel half the confidence he professed, but, knowing the value of a bold front, he intended to keep it up and fight his way out of the danger the best he could. It would not be the first time he had risked his life against odds.

Brown retreated to the corner of the room.

"Men, get behind his back!" he ordered, addressing his confederates.

The importance of this move was apparent to all. While Dorgan had the three in front of him he could threaten all at the same time with his revolvers, but with the gang divided, it was a very different matter.

Brown's change of base left the door unguarded and the detective might have retreated to the hall with a fair prospect of escape, but such was not his purpose. He wished to know why these men had decoyed him, and, great as the odds were, he determined to take one, at least, to the police station, if such a thing was possible.

The contemplated move of the enemy brought matters to a crisis, and Dorgan moved with the quickness which always distinguished him when action was necessary.

The last words were barely out of Brown's mouth when the detective leaped at him like a tiger. Brown tried to throw up his hands as a guard, but the dash took him by surprise and he had no time for elaborate preparation. His hands were beaten down, and, almost before he realized the danger, a pair of handcuffs were secure on his wrists.

Dorgan had done the job with remarkable skill and celerity, the result of long practice; and then he caught his prisoner by the shoulders and swung him around in front of him. This was done just in time.

Brown's allies had improved the chance to draw their revolvers, but they now stood dumfounded as they saw only their leader exposed as a target, while over his shoulder was thrust Duke Dorgan's hand with a gleaming revolver in it.

"If you want to see me, come right along!" coolly directed the detective.

But the men did not advance; they only paused and uttered a few words of extemporaneous profanity.

Brown, however, had become keenly alive to the peril of his own situation.

"You cowards!" he cried, "why don't you pitch in? One bold dash, and it'll all be over."

"You never said a truer thing," Dorgan promptly added; "all will be over. They will be dead men. Stick a pin in that, you two, and be mighty careful what you do. I hold the reins now, whether I did before or not, and not one iota will I give way. This man goes to the station with me!"

Brown had lost some of his color and seemed to be a badly frightened man, and he now addressed his allies very eloquently again. They would be cowards to desert him, and it was a very simple thing if they only went in with him. They were still three to one, if he was bound, and it would be only a moment's work to clean out this solitary detective.

This was all right as an argument, but a stronger one was presented by the silent, unwavering revolver. That looked them in the face, and told mutely of the death-power in its maw. They had never recovered from Duke's first bold move, in allowing himself to be led into their midst, and all their courage now seemed to be oozing away.

While they hesitated Duke considered his next move.

He intended to hold on to Brown, but even his sanguine nature would not allow him to consider it easy to take all three out of the house together.

Clearly, his best way was to take Brown away at once, before the others recovered from their dazed condition, and then send officers for them, or let them escape, if such a course became necessary.

He had the leader of the trio, anyhow.

"We'll go!" he suddenly said, and turned toward the door, pulling Brown after him.

The latter now began a fierce struggle, but he was no match for the detective in point of strength, and he was whisked out into the hall with a rapidity which startled him. Nor was this all. As they went Duke saw the key in the door, and it occurred to him that it might be made useful.

Three quick motions and he had changed it to

the outer side of the door, and given a turn of his hand.

A click followed and the men were locked in.

Dorgan wasted no time. He pushed Brown resistlessly toward the outer door and soon had him on the porch. By this time there was a loud hammering inside, which showed that the other men were active, but he did not heed it. He marched Brown down to the street without ceremony.

Now followed an important question: Was there a policeman in sight? There was not, and Dorgan mentally gave up the other men.

In a few words he notified Brown that his safety depended on good behavior, and as the man's nerve was about all gone, he did not find him contumacious. He was soon taken to the nearest station and locked up, and the detective then led several officers back to the old house.

As was to be expected, the birds had flown and left no trace.

Back to the station Dorgan went. Despite Brown's stout denial he still believed that he had been instigated by Peters, and he wanted a confession to that amount. He went to Brown's cell, where the prisoner sat on a chair in a dejected attitude.

"Here I am again," said the visitor, "and I want a straight story from you. It'll be the worse for you if you don't answer to the point. Why did you try to capture me?"

CHAPTER XX.

A SUMMONS AT NIGHT.

THE prisoner fixed his forehead in a sullen scowl.

"I shall tell nothing," he replied.

"It will be better for you," Dorgan urged.

"I shall tell nothing."

"Then I shall put you through for kidnapping and assaulting me, and I'll make the charge strong."

"Go it!"

"You're a fool, Brown."

"I'm not big enough fool to squeal."

"Come, confess that Levi Peters was the man who set you on."

"I never heard his name until you mentioned it in the house, and I don't know who he is."

Brown spoke firmly, and the detective could not but be impressed with the belief that he spoke the truth. He might be lying, but, if so, he was a good actor. But, if the late attack was not due to Peters, who was at the bottom of it, and why had it been made? Dorgan had made a good many enemies among the criminal classes during his professional career, and any one of them might try to pay off a grudge, but from what Brown had said when he thought he held the winning cards, the detective had got the idea that the attack was made to stop him on some case he was then engaged upon.

And the Rose-Woodside affair was the only one he was actively working.

Duke did not give up so easily, but plied Brown with question after question for a considerable length of time. All his labor was thrown away, however—the prisoner persisted in his policy of silence. When convinced that he was only wasting time Dorgan left the cell and the station-house, took a car and started up-town. He had decided to see Mrs. Rose at once.

When he reached the house, he found that she was not in, and he learned something more that rather startled him. The landlady stated that Mrs. Rose had gone away with two men, stating that "Mr. Dorgan had sent for her."

The detective was at once on the alert, and he asked for a description of the men. It was given, and he at once recognized Peters as one of the strangers.

His first suspicion was thus confirmed, and he felt sure that Peters had played a sharp trick and decoyed Mrs. Rose away. The case grew more exciting, and it was clear that it was to be a race between them for honors. At present Peters held the leading card—Mrs. Rose.

After questioning the landlady further, he left the house. He had in his mind two points for which the abductors might head, and to settle the first he went straight to Professor Woodside's.

There he found the trail still warm.

The servant told of the visit of Wilberson, another man and a woman, and his description proved that they had been Peters and Mrs. Rose. Plainly, the private detective had made a bold push, but the professor's refusal to see them had defeated his first move.

But what had been the second move?

"Now that he has possession of the woman, he will not willingly give her up," thought Dorgan, as he left the house. "He will try to hide her somewhere. Where? It does not seem as though he would be fool enough to take her to his own house; for, though he probably is not aware that I know where he lives, he must comprehend that I can easily learn. Foolish as such a move would be, he may have made it—I'll take a look at his house."

He hailed a cab and directed the driver to make haste. According to what Woodside's servant had said, the kidnappers had been gone but a short time, and he might stumble upon them.

The cab-driver obeyed the injunction to make haste to the letter, and they rattled along at a pace which made Dorgan expect a challenge from a policeman every moment, but none came.

He dismissed the cab when a block distant from Peters's house, so as to avoid notice, and started to finish the journey on foot.

As he rounded the corner he saw another cab approaching, and he could not help thinking that the manner of the driver indicated that he had just left a passenger near there. He was arranging his blanket as though he had just mounted the box.

Acting on a sudden impulse, Dorgan stopped him.

"Have you just dropped a fare here?" he asked.

"Three on 'em."

"At which house?"

"Now you ask too much. It ain't my business ter tell all about my fares," the cabman replied.

Duke produced a dollar bank-note and held it before the driver's eyes.

"Answer my question and describe your fares, and this shall be yours."

"It's a bargain. I left 'em at No. 23."

This was Peters's own quarters, and when the man had added a description, the detective knew he was indeed on the right track. If he had been five minutes sooner, he would have headed the kidnappers off, but he owed it to the extra speed used by his own driver that he had come near enough to get positive evidence.

He handed over the dollar and told the man to go, and then went straight to No. 23. He did not intend to give Peters time to spirit away his prisoner.

His first idea was to ring the bell, but as he reached the house he glanced down the area and saw that the basement door was ajar. His resolution was made in a moment; if he rung he might be denied admittance, but if he walked in without help, he would be inside the fort before any one knew it, and Peters would not dare complain of the intrusion.

In a few seconds he was in the basement hall.

Caution now became necessary. The light was poor and he could hardly see his way, and after listening for a moment, he failed to hear any one on the lower floor, but did hear voices above.

Accordingly, he decided to go up.

He ascended the stairs with light steps, but as he neared the top he became aware that people were speaking there in tones of unusual vehemence.

He paused a moment.

Then came a cry of "Mercy!" in a voice he well knew—it was that of Mrs. Rose. An angry reply followed, and then the door at the top of the stairs was opened in the detective's face.

The man who had opened it recoiled, and then Dorgan stepped coolly into the hall. He stood face to face with Mrs. Rose and Horace Wilberson.

The little woman uttered a cry of glad surprise and fluttered toward the stout detective, but Wilberson turned and would have fled. Dorgan's sharp voice, however, brought him to a halt.

"Hold on, there! Attempt to run, and it will be the worse for you!"

Wilberson paused, and stood in silent consternation.

"Pretty business I find you in!" Duke continued. "How long since you became a woman-stealer?"

Not a word answered the discomfited villain. He could say nothing in extenuation, and he realized that anything else would be a waste of words. Dorgan was not a man to be hoodwinked or frightened.

Mrs. Rose began to explain, but the detective stopped her.

"Mrs. Rose, will you step to the door and see if you can discover a policeman? If so, call him at once."

The request was obeyed, and as an officer chanced to be passing the door, he was soon in the hall. He knew Dorgan and spoke to him at once, and when he was asked to take Wilberson to the station, he did not make the least opposition. Neither did Wilberson. That person shot a malevolent glance at Dorgan, and quietly submitted to the patrolman's grasp.

When he was led out of the house, Dorgan turned smilingly to Mrs. Rose.

"Don't look so frightened, madam. These are every-day occurrences, and not worth a thought. You are perfectly safe now, and it only remains to find your chief enemy, the man, Peters. Can you tell me where he is?"

"Just what I want to know. Where is the scamp?"

It was a new voice, and Duke turned to see a masculine-looking woman with her head cocked on one side and her arms akimbo.

"I'm the mistress o' this house," she added, "an' that oily-tongued rascal was me boarder, but he's a villain. He's just asked me to keep this woman a pris'ner here, but, o' course, I refused, an' when you called the cop, that Peters shot out of the basement door like a rocket."

All this was rattled off volubly and the woman made such a muscular play that Mrs. Rose did not think of exposing the lie in regard to her answer to Peters about keeping the prisoner, but Dorgan was not so easily impressed.

"Are you sure Peters is not now in the house?" he sharply asked.

"Ef you doubt it, you kin look ter your heart's content," was the ready reply.

The detective decided that one of the birds had indeed flown; but he did not give up without a trial. Accompanied by the accommodating landlady and Mrs. Rose, he went all over the house. The result verified his belief; Peters was not in the house.

Dorgan wasted no time. It was probable that Peters would take good care not to venture back at once, so it would be the wisest way to get Mrs. Rose to a place where she could recover from the nervous state into which she had been thrown. She was pale and trembling, and absolute quiet and rest were necessary.

He called another cab and they left the vicinity. On the way Mrs. Rose told her story in full. It revealed nothing new to the detective, though it showed how much in earnest Peters was, and rather confirmed the theory that he had not been concerned in the decoying of Dorgan by Brown.

If the latter point was admitted the detective had a new problem to grasp. He believed that he had the Rose case to thank for the plot against himself, and if he exonerated Peters, whom was he to suspect?

What invisible hand was in the game?

Knowing that it would not be safe for Mrs. Rose to go back to her former quarters, Dorgan took her to the house of a personal friend upon whom he knew he could rely, and left her there with injunctions not to go out of the house, nor trust any one who purported to come from him.

Considering her present state of alarm, she was not likely to do this again.

The detective then went home, and devoted the remainder of the afternoon to considering the case and planning for the future. He retired early, but before he could compose himself to sleep he was aroused and given a hastily-folded note. He opened it and saw one line of writing, with Claudia Woodside's name below.

"Come at once! Something terrible has happened!"

What did it mean?

CHAPTER XXI.

DRIVEN TO DESPERATION.

PROFESSOR WOODSIDE did not appear outside his study after so summarily dismissing Wilberson, Peters and Mrs. Rose, until the dinner hour. Whether he made sure that the servants obeyed his order and rid the house of the unwelcome callers was even unknown, but as his was a front room he had means to satisfy himself without asking questions.

James had rapped at the study door and passed in the card upon which Peters had written that threatening message—"We obey this time, but before this affair ends you shall see all of the police that you want!"—but, Woodside had taken it, and reclosed the door, without giving James a chance to explain.

What he thought of the message nobody knew, and when Claudia knocked, shortly after, her father had answered, without opening the door, that he was busy and could not be disturbed.

Claudia was annoyed and troubled by the last occurrence. What the visit meant she did not know, but it had plainly disturbed the professor, and she was worried for his sake. She strongly suspected, without knowing why, that her father actually feared these people.

And this seemed very strange when she considered how gentle and perfect the professor was—he was all of that in her estimation.

When he appeared at dinner his manner was very much the same as usual. He was prone to periods of deep thought, even when with his children, and it was the same on this occasion; but was it fancy, or did his meditation seem troubled now? Claudia believed that she could discern a shadow on his usual placidity, but he offered no explanation.

When the meal was ended he took his hat and went out. Claudia supposed that he went to the street, but such was not the case. He began walking back and forth in the artistic walks that wound around all through the grounds, his head bent and his manner one of deep thought.

He looked up with some annoyance as he heard a step. He thought Claudia had come to join him, and, much as he cared for her, he did not wish to see her then.

But it was not Claudia. Instead, it was a man, and a very ragged, disreputable-looking person. Moreover, he was no stranger; the professor had seen him only a few days before, when the disreputable person had claimed old acquaintance with him.

Yes, it was Abe Benlow, and looking none the worse for his adventure at Sam Loonsby's house. If he had gone into the sewer he had come out again all right, and there he stood with a peculiar mixture of humility, confidence and arrogance in his manner.

Woodside's conduct was equally peculiar. Before he had refused to talk, and had ordered the man out of the grounds; now he actually seemed pleased to see him.

He folded his hands behind him and looked straight at the coarse, evil face before him.

"So it is you?" he said.

"Yes, yer Honor."

Abe spoke hesitatingly, uneasily, and then added in a deprecating, apologetic way:

"I hope I don't intrude. I seen ye from the street, an'—an' so I come in."

"You were here the other day?"

"Yes, yer Honor."

"If I recollect right, you claimed to have known me some time in the past."

"Why, yes," said Abe, brightening. "We sartainly did know one another. 'Twas when I was 61, an' you 59."

"What do you mean by these numbers?"

"You orter know."

Abe was perplexed. His man was insinuating that he did not know, yet his manner was gentle enough.

"I want to talk with you," said the professor. "Come this way. Now, sit on this bench and tell all you claim to know about me."

They had reached the extremity of the grounds, and a place where the thick trees and gathering twilight made it hard for either to distinctly see the other's face. Abe was sorry for this, and wished for a clew. He did not understand the dignified master of Woodside.

"You ought ter know," he said, again.

"I ask you to tell me all you know. When did we meet before? Where did we meet, and under what circumstances?"

"Wal, I'll tell of ye say so, though other ears may hear," the disreputable man slowly answered.

"Tell all without delay."

There was a touch of sharpness in the professor's voice, and Abe looked still more uneasily at the quiet figure before him. He could not understand this aristocrat.

"Wal, I'll tell the story right from the first, ef it'll be any good," he said, at last. "Ye see, in 18—, I had the misfortin' ter run ag'in' the law in a certain way, fur I was a bit wild in them days, though sence reformed an' settled down; an' it come to pass that I got a sentence ter prison in Charlestown, Massachusetts."

Was it fancy, or did the professor shiver?

"While in thar I made the acquaintance o' other convicts, o' course, an' among 'em was 59. I was 61. The real name o' 59 was Archibald Woodside."

The listener unfolded his hands and made two steps as though about to leave the spot. Then he turned and faced Abe again, very quiet outwardly.

"Go on!" he directed.

"He was an older man than me, but him an' me soon got chummy; quite a likin' we took ter each other, an' I must say he was the best o' the whole lot."

"One word," interrupted Woodside. "What was his offense?"

"Horse-stealin'. Him an' me was together a good deal, an' we nat'rally confided in each other, so I learned a bit o' his history. He had been livin' in Bangor, Maine, and had a wife thar, but he was free so say he did not intend ter ever see her ag'in; he had soured on her, an' wanted ter see no more o' her. When he left Maine he did it in a hurry, 'cause he had been connected with a bit o' funny business about money-makin', an' had ter git out in such haste that he stole a horse at Newburyport ter help him along. It was that miserable horse that done him up; he was pursued, captered, an' sentenced fur stealin' him."

"What kind of a person was this man?"

"Good-hearted ez a lord, but odd—confound-ed odd."

"I mean, how did he look personally?"

"Wal, yer honor, 'bout as *you* do. W'ot's the use o' beatin' around the bush? You know, an' I know, that you was that same man. I never seen you from now until the other day, but 'ceptin' fur bein' older, you hev not changed a bit in the twenty years gone."

There was a brief silence. Convict Benlow was looking up, hoping to be promptly acknowledged by his old associate, but the professor looked directly over his head and said nothing for some seconds. Finally he spoke in a steady, but low voice:

"Are you sure you are not mistaken in identity?"

"Dead sure. I could swear ter yer identity."

"Your old comrade, then, was only guilty of horse-stealing and—"

Benlow finished the hesitating sentence.

"Wal, there was the counterfeitin'," he said, "an' though he would never tell o' his life before that, it's a fact that, the day arter he was released, some men come ter the prison ter arrest him fur *another* piece o' work. They charged that he had murdered a man in New York city!"

Woodside drew a quick, sharp breath which was almost a gasp. There was another pause before he asked:

"Murder of whom?"

"That is what I don't know. I never seen

him arterwards, ez I said afore, an' I merely know he was wanted fer killin' somebody hyar in New York."

"This all you can tell?"

"Yes."

"Now, my man," and the professor's voice grew very earnest, "let me ask if you are *sure* I was the man you knew in Charlestown prison. I will pay you more to say you are mistaken than you can get to say that I am the same man."

"Ef you mean ter ask ef I'm reely sure you're the man, I'll say I kin swear ter it on a stack of Bibles. I *know* you are him! But ez fur keepin' my mouth shet, do the right thing by me, an' tortur' can't make me squeal. I never go back on an old pal, but ez you're rich an' me poor, it *does* seem as though you orter do something fur me, ye know."

Woodside extended a bit of crisp paper.

"Here is five dollars for your trouble—merely for your trouble," he said, quietly. "As for the rest, tell me where to address you and wait until to-morrow, after the bank opens."

Abe's face grew jubilant. He had won an easier, more quiet victory than he dared hope, and he felt so grateful to luck and his companion that he determined to let matters rest just as the professor wished. It would be ingratitude—and folly, approaching danger—to talk of any certain sum just then. He would wait and see how much Woodside sent by mail, or brought, and then, if it did not seem enough, he could apply the screws.

He had the aristocrat in his power, now that the first payment was made, he thought.

But when he was gone, which he did at once and very quietly, Woodside looked after him somberly.

"You will look in vain for the next installment. By to-morrow I shall be past giving money to any one!"

And then he returned to the house, went to his study, produced writing materials and began to cover a sheet of paper with a hurried scrawl quite unlike his usual neat chirography. But, had others seen him then, they would not have wondered that his writing was irregular and obscure; his face was almost deathly pale, and his hands shook painfully.

Three pages of paper he covered, and then he put all in a stout envelope and wrote across its face these words:

"To be opened only when I am dead."

"ARCHIBALD WOODSIDE."

It was less than half an hour later when the servants were startled by a sound from the professor's study—a noise which seemed so like a revolver report to them that they grew at once panic-stricken.

Philip was out, but they rushed to Claudia with their report. It frightened her terribly, and the known annoyance and suspected troubles which had lately beset her father flashed into her mind.

What desperate act had he committed?

Followed by the servants she ran to the study door. Contrary to her expectation, it was not locked. She opened it, and then her heart seemed to stop beating. Motionless on the floor lay her father, a revolver beside him, and his face covered with blood!

CHAPTER XXII.

SIGNS OF TROUBLE MULTIPLY.

HUMAN nature is tested in emergencies, and in this supreme moment it was shown that Claudia Woodside possessed great innate courage and resolution. Her father lay silent, apparently dead, at her feet, and everything seemed to tell of a violent end, but she did not faint or shrink back.

It flashed upon her that then, if ever, was the time to show her devotion to him, and she arose to meet the emergency.

Quickly she went down on her knees, and her hands sought for some sign of life. Her face was startlingly pale, but those fair, white hands did not waver.

"He lives!" she exclaimed. "His pulse beats strongly, and there is still hope."

"Where is the assassin?" asked James, looking around.

"The assassin! Sure enough; I did not think of that. A foul deed has been done, and we are standing here idly. Quick, men! place him on the sofa, and then one of you go for Doctor Evington. The other—James, you must bear a note to Duke Dorgan, the detective!"

And, when the unconscious professor had been moved as she directed, she hurried to the table and wrote one line:

"Come at once. Something terrible has happened!"

To this she signed her name and then addressed an envelope to Dorgan. She had heard Philip mention his address and remembered it well. This done, she bade James make all possible haste to deliver it. When he was gone she went resolutely about what seemed her next duty, and began washing away the blood which stained the professor's face. She found the wound, which was a crease along the scalp, and to her eyes the case seemed hopeful.

How hopeful it was she was soon shown.

After the lapse of some minutes Woodside's eyes suddenly opened, and he looked up at her with more or less of reason.

"What is it?" he asked, in a voice almost as strong as ever. "What has happened?"

"You are injured, father; some one has assaulted you. Don't you remember who?"

She stopped, for he had given a sudden start. He muttered two or three words; words she failed to catch, and then closed his eyes. What passed in his mind during the next minute no one but himself could know, but when he opened them again he looked at one of the female servants.

"Lizzie, come here!"

She obeyed.

"Upon my desk you will find a stout, brown envelope. I wish you to get that—no, no; not you, Claudia; you must stay by me; give me your hand. Lizzie, take that envelope and throw it in the fire at once!"

There was a ring of authority and resolution new to him in his voice, and both Miss Woodside and the servant did as he said. As the servant threw the envelope away she noticed that there was writing across its face, but she could not tell what, not being able to read.

Had the professor been aware of the latter fact when he chose her to destroy it?

He watched eagerly as the flames of the grate fire seized upon the document and turned it brown and shapeless, and an expression of satisfaction stole over his face. Then he turned again to his daughter.

"Claudia," he said, in a firm voice, "I am not seriously injured, and you need have no fear. As for this unfortunate affair, it was purely accidental. I was handling a revolver—a weapon I know but little about—and it was accidentally discharged. That is the whole case in a nutshell, and as no great harm is done, we need give it no more thought."

This swept away James's theory that there had been an assassin in the case, but Claudia was for a moment unable to answer.

She remembered the first suspicion which had flashed over her—the fear that her father had deliberately made away with himself—and her heart told her that his explanation was not a true one.

It was equally clear to her, however, that whatever he had done, he was now sorry for it; his unusual firmness told of a mind reawakened to healthy ideas and influences, and she felt sure that there was no danger of a repetition of the rash act.

She concealed her thoughts with natural tact, and gave him only words of love and encouragement, and then the hastily-summoned doctor arrived. He was a man of common sense and good judgment, and he did his work well and without empty show. He pronounced the wound trifling in one sense of the word; it had at first stunned Woodside, but with proper care he would soon be all right again.

Claudia watched jealously to see if he suspected anything wrong, but, if so, there was nothing to indicate it.

He was still there when the door-bell rung again. Claudia had expected it, and she at once glided from the room; she believed that she knew who had come. She now regretted having so prematurely sent for Duke Dorgan, and wished to be the one to meet him.

Her wish was gratified, and she it was who opened the door. She smiled into the detective's face, but made no movement toward asking him in, or, indeed, allowing him to enter.

"Good-evening, Mr. Dorgan," she said, pleasantly. "I see you have come promptly, but there was really no cause for my course in summoning you."

"Indeed!" said Dorgan, with a puzzled air.

"Father has met with an accident. He was handling a revolver in his study when it was accidentally discharged, inflicting a painful wound. I supposed at first that it was the work of some burglar, or something of that sort, but, happily, it proves to be otherwise."

She still stood directly before him, and he read the truth; he was not wanted inside—more, he could not go there without rudeness on his part.

"I trust that the injury is not serious," he said, kindly.

"The doctor assures us it is not."

"I should not have expected as careful a man as Professor Woodside to meet with such an accident."

"Ah! but he is not accustomed to revolvers."

If Dorgan had felt called upon to press the matter he would have asked how Woodside happened to have a revolver then, but he was not disposed to do this. It was not his place to show the iron hand and annoy Claudia.

"Well," he added, after some minor conversation, "I suppose I am not needed, after all?"

"Thank you, Mr. Dorgan, but you are not. I was in a panic when I sent for you, and had not learned the truth. Happily, it was a simple affair. I am grateful that you came so promptly, and will see that you are rewarded."

"Pray don't mention that part, Miss Woodside; I could not think of considering it. I will not keep you here, for your father may need you. I am glad he is not seriously injured, and,

assuring you of my sympathy, will now return home. Good-night!"

He raised his hat, turned and went down the walk. He did not look around until the street was reached. When he did, Claudia had disappeared.

"So," he thought, with a grave smile, "there has almost been a fatal tragedy at Woodside House. Miss Woodside was determined to keep me out of the house; a proceeding which was not so very wise on her part. It would have awakened suspicion where none existed, but, in this case, suspicion would have arisen, anyway. To-day Archibald Woodside's wronged wife visited him in company with boisterous, though stupid men; this evening, the professor has been almost shot dead with a revolver. The conclusion is plain—hemmed in and desperate, Woodside has attempted suicide!"

The detective was not in a very cheerful mood, for he saw bitter pain ahead for those connected with his case. If, as Ralph Hathaway believed, Professor Woodside had deliberately murdered the former's father, he was undeserving of pity, and no punishment could be too great, but with Ralph and Claudia it was different.

They had joined their lives in marriage, but Ralph now knew of that old tragedy, and Claudia must soon know of it. When she did learn that her father had murdered her husband's father—what then?

"Poor Claudia!" muttered Dorgan; "I can see only misery for her in the future!"

He returned home, retired, and slept the night out peacefully. The next morning he received two items of news. The first was to the effect that Horace Wilberson had escaped from the patrolman, when on the way to the station-house, and that he had not been found.

The second was in the form of a telegram from the Bangor police chief, in answer to his inquiries. It was as follows:

"The old church is yet standing, though now occupied for business purposes. One of Zachary Rose's old associates is here; he served time for counterfeiting, and is now apparently trying to lead an honest life. Possibly you could make him talk."

Dorgan quietly folded the telegram.

"I will certainly try to make him talk—I will start for Bangor to-day. The idea is strong in my mind that if Rose did not destroy the marriage-certificate, it is hidden in that old church. If I can once get it, I shall be able to win Mrs. Rose's case and give her Professor Woodside as a husband—if she then wants him. I doubt if she will when she knows that he killed Temple Hathaway."

Finishing breakfast, the detective went to the station-house to see his prisoner, Brown. That person had had time to meditate, and his fears might have been aroused so that he would confess.

They might have been, but, in point of fact, were not. Brown had never more stoutly declined to talk, and after an unavailing attempt, Duke left the station and called on Mrs. Rose.

He only remained to surround her with extra safeguards, for he knew that Peters would be on the alert and anxious to repossess her, and this Duke was determined he should not do.

When he left her he started at once on his journey.

It was made without accident, and, in due time, he reached Bangor. Once there, his first step was to see the chief of police, and after a short conversation the latter agreed to take him to Zachary Rose's old associate.

He was now running a hotel, and Dorgan had but little faith in his reported reformation when he saw the locality and the building. It seemed a fit resort for thieves and cut-throats, and he felt to see that his revolver was in place before entering the sinister-looking building.

CHAPTER XXIII.

RALPH IS SUMMONED.

PROFESSOR WOODSIDE had passed a good night, and was in better condition in the morning than even the doctor had expected. Delicate and nervous as he looked he plainly had marked powers of recuperation, and his condition was so favorable that he was only nominally confined to his bed.

He showed a quiet resolution, too, which was new to him, and Claudia felt sure there was no longer danger that he would do harm to himself. If, as she believed, he had tried to commit suicide, it was only when he was so sorely beset that his mind was temporarily clouded.

He had evidently repented thoroughly, and resolved to bravely face whatever trouble threatened him.

In a quiet way, and with womanly tact, Claudia tried to win his confidence and learn the truth. She knew the folly of direct questioning, but, feeling that she ought to know his troubles, she gave him every chance to tell, yet covered every advance carefully and well.

But Woodside did not explain.

Claudia had her private griefs to bear. She had not heard from Ralph Hathaway since that unsatisfactory, perplexing visit to his home, and she felt grieved that this was so. She was his

wife, yet, almost the hour after the marriage, he first declined to see her—then met her with cold manner and strange words—and now he neither came nor sent any word.

What did it mean? Was he, could he be already tired of her?—he, in whom she had trusted implicitly, feeling that she could depend upon him in any emergency. No; she would not believe evil of him. All would be well; in some way he would explain all satisfactorily. It was a woman's reasoning, blind, yet comforting.

During the afternoon the professor was even more comfortable. He had had all done for him to this end that was possible; Claudia had bestowed every care and attention upon him that her ingenuity could devise, and he was well aware of it.

Nor was he ungrateful. Whatever his faults he loved Claudia, and she had only added that day to her long devotion to his happiness and comfort.

He lay a long time in deep thought, and ended by calling her name. She came quickly to his side.

"What can I do, father?"

"Nothing, excepts to sit down and listen. I want to speak of Ralph Hathaway!"

A shadow crossed her beautiful face.

"Hadn't we better postpone the subject?"

"No. I have been thinking, and I want to speak. Claudia, do you love this young man deeply?"

"I do, with my whole heart," replied Claudia, with simple earnestness.

"And he returns your affection?"

"Yes."

"And wishes you to be his wife?"

"Yes."

Claudia's mind flitted back to that secret marriage in the dim old church, and she wondered what the professor would say if he knew all, but he gave her no further time for reflection. He went on steadily:

"I have been thinking earnestly, and I see that I ought to regard your happiness above all things. Heaven forbid that I should stand between you and that happiness. I have opposed Ralph, knowing that there was a stain on the family name, and jealous of your reputation—dreading to see any one look scornfully at you—but I am convinced that I have been too sensitive."

"Father!"

"Yes, I admit it; I have been too critical. Far be it from me to visit any man's faults on the head of his innocent children, and I believe Ralph Hathaway to be an honorable man. He surely is not responsible for his father's shortcomings, and it would be a cowardly act to try and make him responsible. Heaven forbid that fault of mine should be visited on my children!"

The professor had grown nervous and somewhat excited, and Claudia kissed him tenderly.

"Dear father, that can never be. Those who know you also know that you are above blame and without fault."

Woodside sighed deeply, hesitated, ignored the remark, and went on earnestly:

"Having reasoned all this out, Claudia, I see that I have been wrong. Even if the hard, unfeeling world sneers, it will be but a passing ripple; others will follow and sweep away the first. But you, my daughter, when a woman like you loves, it is not for a day, a month, or a year alone—'tis for life and eternity."

Claudia silently caressed his hand.

"Realizing all this," the professor resumed, "I may compress my decision in a few words: Send for Ralph, let me see him first, and alone, and if he talks to me as I believe he will—as an honest man should—he can then go to you with my consent to your marriage!"

Thus it was that when Ralph returned from his daily work that evening, he found a note from Claudia awaiting him. It was brief, barely asking him to call without fail, and adding that she had good news for both of them, but through it ran a vein of hope which found no responsive echo in Ralph's troubled mind.

The young man seemed to have aged greatly in a few days. He was no longer the strong, self-reliant person of old, and his haggard look was painful, yet it was nothing to what he actually endured.

Married to the daughter of his father's murderer, and she the dearest of all women.

"Heaven pity us both," he said, as he read the letter, "but I cannot go—I cannot enter that man's house!"

But, anon, he grew softer of will, and the promise of Claudia's note moved him. She had "good news." Perhaps—well, in any case, he would go and see her.

He went, and was received by a servant and ushered into an up-stairs room. Until he entered Ralph was ignorant of two things—the professor's "accident," though it was mentioned in the papers casually, and of the fact that he would see Woodside, not Claudia.

When he did see the professor, sitting up in bed, with pillows at his back and his head bandaged, the young man paused abruptly. The sight surprised him.

"Mr. Hathaway," said Woodside, kindly,

"please take this chair beside me. I would like to talk with you, if agreeable to you."

A flush of anger was mounting to Ralph's face. As he mentally expressed it he had been decoyed into this interview, and with a man he loathed. It was cowardly, he thought—a base deception. Yet, somehow, he felt compelled to obey the quiet gesture of Woodside's hand, and he sat down as directed, in silence.

"You expected to see Claudia?" questioned the elder man, with a smile.

"Yes," was the mechanical reply.

"You shall do so soon, but I wish to speak to you first. You are aware, Mr. Hathaway, that I have opposed her marriage to you, and you know my motive. I am now convinced that I have been unjust. I beg your pardon!"

"You beg my pardon?" Ralph echoed.

"I do."

"I do not understand."

"In saying who is fit, and who unfit, to marry Claudia, I had no right to look beyond the man, himself. Each one of us should be judged by his individual character alone, and in this estimate I believe you are not wanting. Believing you, then, to be an honest man, I feel that I can no longer stand between you and Claudia."

By this time Ralph was himself again. His surprise—his mechanical conduct—was gone, and his mind had resumed its wonted action. Something like a smile crossed his face, but it was not an agreeable expression.

"If I understand you, you withdraw your opposition to our marriage?"

"That is it, exactly."

Woodside spoke with all the outward kindness possible, but Ralph's lips curled with scorn.

"I know your motive!" he said, but his suppressed emotion was misunderstood by the professor.

"I thought you would understand."

"Understand!" echoed Ralph, vehemently; "it would be a blind dolt who did not understand. I am not now blind, however it has been in the past, and I do comprehend that you offer me Claudia as a bribe to secure your own safety—to save your miserable self!"

He had arisen and was pouring out these words rapidly, but Woodside's face expressed only surprise.

"Ralph—Mr. Hathaway!" he exclaimed, "I do not understand."

"You understand well enough."

The professor flushed slightly.

"Pardon me," he said, "but you surely do not realize the force of what you say—"

"I fully realize all, and let me say this much more: If you could add to your bribe all the wealth of Manhattan Island, I could not be enticed into the trap. Sir, I would not own relationship to you if you could offer me Claudia's hand a thousand times over!"

He meant what he said then, however he might feel in his cooler moments. Believing that Woodside had decided to give him Claudia so that he—the professor—need not be punished for the murder of Temple Hathaway, the young man turned with loathing from the bribe and the briber.

But Woodside seemed utterly dumfounded; he sat and looked at Ralph as though he believed that he had taken leave of his senses, and words refused to come at his bidding.

"A cunning trick, but it won't succeed," Ralph added, bitterly.

Then the professor found his voice, and he answered with grave dignity:

"Mr. Hathaway, you have said what you will regret in your calmer moments, but I remember that you are still young. For Claudia's sake, I pardon you—"

"I refuse to be pardoned!" was the fierce interruption. "Do you think you can play with me? No! by Heaven, no! I said awhile ago that I was no longer blind, and I am not. I know all, and, having said this, I will remain no longer in a house where I insult the dead by conversing with the living."

He turned away, but Woodside's voice arose in sharp, unnatural tones, yet commandingly:

"Stop! You have said too much not to say more. I demand an explanation!"

Ralph wheeled fiercely.

"So be it then, if you will have the truth. You have objected to me because, forsooth, there was a blot on my family name, and because that of your daughter was so eminent, so spotless! I have been made to feel that I was the inferior of the two. My poverty has been flaunted in my face—"

"I deny it; I emphatically deny it!" cried Woodside.

"And the false, vile charge against my father has been harped upon," Ralph went on, almost madly; "and you have posed as a model of virtue and respectability. Let me tell you, sir, that I know the truth at last, and were Claudia a thousand times dearer to me than she is, I would not enter your family. I know now, sir, that though my father was not a dishonest man he was the victim of a cowardly murder. And you—you, Archibald Woodside—are the man who murdered him!"

Vehemently he poured forth these words, shaking his hand before Woodside's face, and both faces were pale and tremulous, though from

different causes; but, at the last words, Ralph wheeled and ran from the room and down the stairs.

Claudia met him in the hall, but recoiled at sight of his face. Its pallor, and the wild gleam of his eyes, struck a chill to her heart.

"Ralph!" she gasped, "oh! Ralph, what is wrong?"

He laughed loudly, wildly.

"Nothing!" he cried; "nothing but ruin and desolation!"

And then, unheeding the fact that she would have stopped him, he dashed out of the house and down the walk like a madman. And he was little else then.

Claudia clasped her hand over her heart and reeled against the wall, dumfounded and dizzy, but, recovering her strength a little, hastened up-stairs and to her father's room. The professor lay on the bed in a death-like swoon!

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TEST OF A WOMAN'S HEART.

CLAUDIA fell upon her knees beside the bed. All her strength seemed gone, and she could neither act nor think like herself. A few minutes before she had been happy in the thought that she would soon be united in reality to Ralph, and now he had fled from the house without a kind word to her, and her father, whom he had just left, lay there in a swoon like death.

The blow went to her heart like a dagger-thrust.

"Oh! merciful Heaven!" she cried, "what—what has happened? In mercy's name, let me die!"

It was the outpouring of misery, all the more bitter because blind, and with one like Claudia, it could not long last. Her strong will—her heroic self-control—returned, and she forgot herself and sprang to her feet. One caress, one kiss, she gave the unconscious man before her, and then set to work to revive him.

Again there was that remarkable steadiness of her hands seen when the professor was wounded, and her every movement was to the point. Her heart seemed breaking, but she would not let her feelings rule then.

Her duty was to her father, and she went about it heroically.

Her efforts were successful. Not many minutes had passed when signs of returning consciousness became visible to her close gaze, and then, at last, the professor opened his eyes and looked at her with reason, if not with calmness.

A shiver shook his whole frame, and his mind at once turned to the late interview.

"Is he gone?" he asked in a whisper.

"Yes; and, oh! father, why did he go as he did? He rushed from the house, almost without a word to me—without one word of kindness. What has happened? Oh! tell me, what has happened?"

She felt that it was no time to ask such questions, but her heart was full to overflowing, and she could not govern herself.

The professor hesitated, shivered again, and then replied in a husky voice:

"Don't ask me!"

"Did you quarrel?"

"Yes, no—I don't know. That is, I tried to be kind, and bring about all that I promised, but he would not—"

He paused in his stammering speech, and Claudia, pale and trembling, slowly asked:

"Would he not listen to you?"

"Ask me nothing, my child. It is better that you—Ask me nothing, but leave me alone."

He showed such evident signs of distress, and of worrying himself into a fever, that Claudia would not press the subject. She did not leave him, though. He had closed his eyes and was lying very still, but she felt that he was suffering mentally, and that it was unsafe for him to be alone.

It was a dreary time for the girl. No ray of hope appeared on the horizon; her father was ill and miserable, and Ralph's conduct was unexplainable by any theory she could adopt; the shadow of trouble rested darkly on them all, and she was utterly in the dark. At one time she thought of writing to Ralph and imploring—ay, commanding—him to explain, but her pride rebelled at the idea. Whatever was wrong, it was his duty, she believed, to be frank with his young wife, and his conduct was an insult to common sense and to her.

It would be no caprice—no act of temper—if she settled down with dignity to wait until he apologized.

The night passed, but it was a restless, unfavorable one for Professor Woodside, as was the following day. He did not vouchsafe any explanation, but lay for hours in thought, staring at the blank wall. She felt that he suffered, yet he made no explanation and she could ask for none. No word came from Ralph, and the suspense was something terrible.

Despite this she was outwardly cheerful, and never had Woodside received more tender care. He repaid her with kind, loving words, but his heart, like hers, was full. She clung to him as her only sure friend; he realized his love and

hers all the more because he knew that she might soon receive a terrible blow through him.

If open disgrace came, it would be worse for her than for him.

The second day found him much improved. He rallied from the new blow as he had from that dealt by Abe Benlow, and grew firm and calm. It had occurred to him that, for Claudia's sake, he ought to face the danger bravely, and ward it off, if possible, and he intended to do it.

For the first time since his wound was inflicted he was up and about the room, and he seemed nearly as strong as ever.

Claudia's spirits rose with his, and she was greatly encouraged. It occurred to her that he would soon be in his study, and she stole down there to put it to rights somewhat. This had long been her task, for Woodside had always declared that she was the only woman who could handle his treasures without spoiling one-half and losing the other.

As she worked she came upon one article which he must have had in use just before his "accident," for it had not been returned to its place. She knew where it belonged; in the lower drawer of the cabinet; and she proceeded to restore it to its proper place.

As she opened the drawer she caught sight of a small package of papers which looked like letters tied in a pile, and on the upper side was this inscription:

"CORRESPONDENCE: Woodside—Hathaway."

Her attention became fixed, and she murmured:

"What can it mean? It is father's writing, and he must have been corresponding with Ralph unknown to me."

A great desire seized her to know what was in those letters, but her sense of honor made her hesitate. She had been taught to regard the reading of another's private letters as despicable meanness, and such was her own opinion, but the temptation was now overpowering. Perhaps by reading them she could solve the whole mystery, and surely she had a right to know.

"I will read them!" she suddenly exclaimed. "In this case, at least, the end justifies the means, and I shall wrong no one more than I have been wronged."

This decision arrived at she was not slow about making the investigation. She untied the package and unfolded the first paper. It was a letter, and at the bottom was the signature—"Temple Hathaway."

"Ralph's father!" murmured Claudia, in surprise.

Yes, the letter was so signed, and dated a score and more of years before, and the paper on which it was written was of a bluish tinge and peculiar surface. No such paper had been on the market since Claudia could remember, but she had seen sheets like it among the professor's old-time papers before then.

She had found the letters otherwise than what she had expected, but their attraction was not lessened. Letters from Temple Hathaway to her father, twenty odd years ago! What might they not reveal?

"I have a right to know!" murmured the girl.

They were four in number, and she read the first. She gathered from its contents that Temple Hathaway had been one of a business firm on Leonard street, New York, and it seemed that her father, Archibald Woodside, had made some business proposal to the firm. Just what this was did not appear, but South America was frequently referred to, and it seemed that the firm hesitated to adopt the scheme suggested, because it was "risky."

The second and third letters were much like the first, and merely indicated the progress of negotiations, though the third indicated that the firm intended to comply with Woodside's suggestions and give him a share of its profits.

The fourth and last, dated a week after the third, was more startling and interesting in its nature. It read as follows:

"ARCHIBALD WOODSIDE:—"

"Your last letter is received and read. It contains some plausible arguments, but they fall on me without effect. Now that you have thoroughly shown us your scheme, I decline to take part in it. I cannot answer for my partners, but it is dishonorable, and I will not be a party to such a scheme. I have told my partners so. As for your thinly-disguised threat, when you say we *dare not* retreat after going so far, I say we *dare and will*. Your proposal is dishonest; I will not take part in it. I am ready to overlook your intemperate language to me, but I bid you beware how you attempt to *force* us to do your will. I am ready to believe you a desperate man in more ways than one, but I care nothing for that. Intrenched in the stronghold of honor, I defy you!"

"TEMPLE HATHAWAY."

Claudia completed the letter, but she sat for a long time staring at it blankly. After all that Professor Woodside had said about Temple Hathaway's want of honor, this letter came in strangely. It seemed to reverse the case, and she remembered with a strange sinking of her heart that Ralph had intimated that the barrier to their union arose, not from what his father had done, but from what had been done to him.

"Can it be," thought the bewildered girl,

"that my father was once less than an honorable man?—that *he*, not Temple Hathaway, was the wrong-doer? Why else should Ralph refuse to have the past overlooked? But no, no! I will not believe it! I will believe nothing against my kind, noble father!"

She paused for a moment, then slowly added:

"Yet these are dangerous, tell-tale papers to have around. What if some one else should see them? I will not leave them here, for prying eyes to see; I will take them to my room and, when I have considered the matter further, will either destroy them, or advise father to do so."

She did take them to her room, and there concealed them carefully but not so easily did she clear them from her mind. Their purport troubled her, and more than once she caught herself wondering if Temple Hathaway had been the guilty man he was represented.

If he could have been cleared in any way except by throwing blame on her own father, she would have hailed the chance. As it was—she shivered whenever she thought of it. No; she would believe nothing against her father.

Late in the afternoon she thought she heard the professor's voice in the hall, and she stepped out of the back parlor. Yes, there he was, fully dressed—a fact not so surprising, considering how well he had been all day.

But he was not alone. Two strangers were there, having evidently forced their way past James, and one now advanced toward her father.

"Archibald Woodside," he said, in a loud voice, "I have a correct warrant here, and I arrest you in the name of the law!"

The speaker was Levi Peters.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PROFESSOR'S CASE DARKENS.

It was a striking and startling tableau. There was Peters as the principal actor in the scene, pompous, confident and triumphant—for this time he was armed with a warrant and intended to bring Woodside to his feet, anyhow. He really did seem to hold a winning hand, and the almost gigantic fellow at his back would not be an easy man to throw out, if the people of the house were mad enough to scorn the warrant and try their old tactics.

Professor Woodside stood staring at him in evident terror. He had felt strong enough until then, but had grown weak—terribly weak. He scarcely managed to keep his feet, and his visible trembling and pallid face would have moved a less hard-hearted man.

Not so with Peters. He was smarting under the memory of his past experience in that house and now was the hour of his revenge. What mattered it to a mind as ignoble as his if the victim was old and gray-headed?

The professor was unable to speak, but not so Claudia.

She sprang forward and threw her arms about her helpless father.

"Sir," she indignantly cried, "what miserable jest is this? How dare you use such words here?"

"*Dare* is a big word, my lady," mocked the private detective, with a swagger, "and it don't fit well in your mouth. I *dare* because I have here a warrant for the arrest of Archibald Woodside."

"It is a trick," began Claudia, but he interrupted her brusquely.

"Look at it for yourself!"

He spread the document out, and though she had never seen one like it, its official appearance struck new alarm to her troubled, almost breaking, heart.

"You shall not take him from me!" she cried.

"Who'll prevent?" he coarsely asked.

"I will—I, his daughter! He is weak, ill; you shall not take him away. I will defend him with my life, and I pray heaven to give me strength. He has done no wrong, and he shall not be dragged away. I will go before the mayor—the governor—any one—I don't care who; but they can all tell you that Archibald Woodside is too honorable a man to have done any wrong!"

It was a noble, if illogical, speech, and hovering tenderly over the miserable old man, who cowered and had no words at his command, she rose to the height of grand declamation, but Peters laughed unfeelingly.

"So were Judas and Cain!" he retorted.

"Tell me, if you dare, what charge is against him?" Claudia vehemently added.

"I will, if you say so, but *he* knows already—"

"Tell me the charge!" she imperiously added.

"Just as you say. Archibald Woodside is charged with—"

"You have said enough. STOP!"

It was a new, a commanding voice, and it arose from a point directly behind Peters. He wheeled like a flash.

"Duke Dorgan!" he almost gasped.

Yes, there was Duke Dorgan, as calm as though no matter of importance was transpiring, but his gaze met that of the private detective in a strong, steady, ominous way which made the latter recoil and grow alarmed. Somehow, he feared Dorgan as he had never before feared any man.

Duke advanced and tapped his rival quietly on the shoulder with one finger!

"You need not explain," he said, "for your warrant will not be served!"

Never had he spoken more calmly, but Peters suddenly flushed and a determined gleam appeared in his eyes.

"By my life, it *will* be served!" he cried. "Beware how you interfere here, Duke Dorgan; I hold a genuine warrant, and represent the law. You interfere with me at your peril. Beware how you act!"

A calm, grave smile had appeared on Dorgan's face. He was towering above Peters and looking down upon him in a serene, unmoved, yet impressive, way, which made him seem like a ruler among his subjects, rebellious though they might be.

He had the air of a *master*!

"Peters," he quietly said, "step this way. I want a word with you in private."

"I have nothing to say in private."

"You will do precisely as I say," coolly replied Dorgan. "It will be best for you."

Peters glared angrily at the athletic man before him, but there was a sinking at his heart which was not to be despised. He knew there were vulnerable places in his record of the past, and he was afraid of cool Duke Dorgan.

Assuming as pompous a manner as possible he said that, "to avoid argument," he *would* give the detective a word in private, and they went aside.

Claudia, though silent, was looking hopefully, imploringly at Dorgan. She had before had a prejudice against him because, when she summoned him, he might have learned too much, but he now seemed to be on the scene as a champion.

She hoped for the best.

Two other men had followed Duke in. If they were detectives she did not want to know the class intimately. Both appeared to be men of low rank in life, and one was flashily dressed, like a sporting-man.

Dorgan and Peters paused at the extremity of the hall.

"Well, what is it?" the latter growled.

"I want you to forego arresting Woodside."

"I decline," Peters stoutly replied. "I have a warrant for his arrest on a serious charge, and I shall arrest him."

"You will not!" Dorgan serenely answered.

Peters flushed a dark-red.

"Be careful what you do!" he hissed. "The law—"

"Bah! You are are a pretty man to prate about the law—you who have been breaking it all your life. As for Woodside he is *my* game. I want you to let him alone, and I'll tell you why. Interfere with him and I'll have you arrested on three charges. First, assaulting me and stealing from me a photograph; secondly, kidnapping Mrs. Rose; thirdly, about the Bremner case, you know!"

With the Bremner case this story has nothing to do, but it was one which Peters had handled. Dorgan knew this, his late investigations having opened his eyes to Peters's real character, and he was aware of the nature of the shot he was speeding. It went home. Peters recoiled, and a frightened look appeared in his face.

Duke looked at him in silence, waiting for him to speak, but Peters was very slow about it.

"I—I didn't know—" he began stammeringly.

"That I knew? Well, I do, and ask you plainly if you are not willing to abandon your project of arresting Woodside? You say you have a warrant. This is true, though the man who issued it is a miserable creature, more worthy of prison honors than any other. I want you to destroy this warrant."

"But Woodside is guilty. I have ample evidence to prove that he is guilty of—"

"You hesitate. Well, I know what you were about to say. I do not give an opinion on the case, but this I do say: Woodside is *my* game. I want you to let him alone."

It was a bitter disappointment for Peters, but he dared not rebel. He read the mettle of his rival, and knew that his threat would be kept. The safest—the only way for Peters was to retreat. He did it most ungraciously, merely telling his man in a surly voice to follow him, and then they went from the house.

Dorgan and his companions went almost as abruptly, thereby preventing any thanks from Claudia. She had gone to help her father to a chair, and when she returned they were moving down the walk.

Another strange, startling episode was over, and she was none the wiser as to the errand which brought them there. She questioned her father, but he declared that he had no idea whatever as to the nature of the charge, and advanced the idea that, as Deep Duke had so easily driven the other men away, they probably were blackmailers and had no charge against him.

This theory did not impress Claudia as plausible, nor was her father's manner open and frank as he made it.

In the mean while Dorgan led his two followers to his own room and gave them seats.

"Now, Quane," he said, addressing the flashy

man, "you have seen our party, prematurely, but plainly. What have you to say? Is he the man you knew in Bangor, as Zachary Rose?"

"He's the very gent," was the confident reply. "Why, when I seen him, it so hit me that I almost forgot my promise to you and nearly went up to see him. Yes, siree; he's the very chap. I'll swear to it!"

Quane spoke emphatically. He was the man Deep Duke had gone to Bangor to see—Zachary Rose's old associate—and though an emergency had obliged the detective to show him Woodside under circumstances he would not otherwise have adopted, he seemed honest in his verdict.

Deep Duke turned to the other man. This person had been porter in the store where Temple Hathaway met his death, at the time of the tragedy, and was evidently an honest man. He had been found, questioned, and led to state a fact he had long concealed in order not to lose his situation with the surviving partners of Hathaway's old home—he admitted that he had seen the Archibald Woodside referred to by Hathaway in his dying statement to his wife, as he had often visited the store, and he, too, had been given a sight at the professor with the same object in view.

"Well, Allen, what have you to say?" Dorgan asked. "Does Professor Woodside resemble the Archibald Woodside of old?"

"He's the man!" was the quick reply.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"And ready to swear to it?"

"Yes."

"Recollect that this is a serious matter, and that twenty years is a long time."

"I know, but time ain't changed this man as it generally does. Except that he's a bit older, he looks jest as he used to when he come visiting the firm."

"You had a good chance to see him then?"

"Certain. I was always in sight of the office, and couldn't help it. I never forget a face, and when I seen that man to-day it brought back old times with a rush. I am willing to swear that he's the same man!"

Dorgan leaned back in his chair in a very thoughtful mood. Somehow, he would have been better pleased if the verdict had been otherwise. It seemed a pity to break up such a household as the professor's, and he thought of Claudia with great pity.

It would be a terrible blow to her.

Yet, justice must be done. It would be throwing away pity to show mercy to the man who had shown none to Temple Hathaway. Murder had been done, and justice, though tardy, must be meted out with a firm hand.

CHAPTER XXVI.

KIDNAPPED IN A CAB.

THE silence was suddenly broken by Allen.

"By George!" he exclaimed, "I've got an idea!"

"What is it?" Dorgan asked.

"It has suddenly occurred to me that mebbe I can put you in a way to learn more about Woodside."

"If so, do it, by all means."

"Well, you see, once when he came into the store he found the partners out, an' so chatted a little while with me. Now, it's a long time to look back, but it really seems to me that Woodside told me he was connected with John Bergnam."

"Who is John Bergnam?"

"Why, I supposed you knew. He's the dealer in South American goods, an' he's still in business—got an office on Broadway, New York, near Battery Park."

"Are you sure of this?"

"Well, I won't swear to it. It didn't much interest me then, an' I've never thought of it since. It's a long time to look back, but I vow I do believe he said so."

He seemed to be honest in this statement, and though Dorgan had no great amount of faith in his sudden recollection, if such it was, he determined to test it. A glance at his watch showed him that by making good time he could probably catch Bergnam before he left his office, and he disposed of Allen and Quane and started at once.

When he reached the New York end of the ferry, he took a cab to expedite matters, and was soon being whirled away. He found Bergnam, and at once set him down as a valuable man, if he knew anything about the matter. He had the appearance of being not only well-to-do, but honest and refined—a good man to present to a jury, if it came to that. He questioned Mr. Bergnam.

"Remember Woodside?" repeated the old gentleman. "Why, certainly I do; I never forget an employee. True, Woodside was with us only six months, but I've not forgotten him."

"When was he employed by you?"

Bergnam consulted a book, and then gave the dates. According to this he had begun his term of service within a week of the time Professor Woodside was said to have left for Europe.

"Why did he leave you?" Dorgan then asked.

"We 'shipped' him. He knew nothing about the business—we only took him because he was well recommended—and he proved to be any-

thing but practical, poured wild business schemes into our heads until we became disgusted, and then we let him go."

Further questioning satisfied the detective that Bergnam knew nothing about the Temple Hathaway affair, and as Woodside had not been authorized to broach new schemes to any one for Bergnam, it was probable that he had made that particular scheme a side issue, with his own interests solely in view.

"You say he was well recommended," pursued Duke. "May I ask by whom?"

"Eb nezer Oates, a Jersey City clergyman."

"Ah! I know him."

"A fine man, I think."

"Undoubtedly. Now, Mr. Bergnam, I don't mind saying to you that I am a detective, and on an important case. Would you be willing to see a man who, I have reason to believe, is your former employee, and see if you can identify him?"

"It will not be pleasant, for I have an aversion to such matters, but I will do as you ask, freely."

"Thank you. I also want Mr. Oates to see him, so, if you will call at the clergyman's house at—say two o'clock—to-morrow, we will contrive to give you both a look at the same time. Is that agreeable?"

Bergnam said it was, and the arrangement was settled. Then, as it was already past Bergnam's hour of leaving, Dorgan took his departure. He had directed his cabman to wait for him, and in the gathering darkness he perceived a vehicle by the curb. He glanced at the driver, who was on the box, briefly directed him to return to the ferry, and then entered the cab.

This done he proceeded to speculate on his latest discoveries. They promised a good deal. If the Jersey City minister, who had recommended Woodside, had not forgotten him in the lapse of time, he might be able to clear up the whole case in short order.

At any rate, Bergnam must see the professor.

"Let him identify the man, as Allen and Quane have done, and I will arrest Woodside at once. It is a sad case, but I have no choice in the matter. Poor Claudia! She is irrevocably married to Ralph Hathaway, and the truth will about kill her, I suspect. Poor girl!"

The detective's sympathy was sincere. Time and his profession had not served to harden his heart, and he could still feel keenly for the unfortunate.

He was so deeply engaged in thought that he paid no attention to the course the cab was taking, but he was suddenly aroused as it made an abrupt turn to the right, dashed through a wide doorway, and then entered the unmistakable precincts of a stable.

"Why, the stupid has forgotten that he has a passenger!" thought the sleuth.

He wrenched open the cab-door and thrust his head out, to emphatically notify him of the error, but, as he did so, something fell upon his head with great force and he dropped to the bottom of the vehicle.

The blow did not stun him, but it seemed to utterly deprive him of the power of motion, and when rough hands seized and dragged him out he could not resist, though sufficiently clear-headed to realize that he was in a trap.

He was borne into a little room and dumped into a chair, and, as the men saw that he was conscious, a revolver was thrust almost into his face.

"Not a word, now!" warned a rough voice. "If you try to yell, I'll put a bullet through your head!"

But Dorgan neither stirred nor spoke. He saw that he had four men opposed to him, and, in his present condition, he would certainly stand no chance with them in a fight.

"Quite a surprise-party for you!" mocked the last speaker. "Your cabby is miles away by this time. You see, we took the venture of dismissing your cab, and putting one of ours in its place, while you waited on Broadway, and you walked right into the trap like a lamb. Deep Duke, indeed! Why you're just a shallow greeny—you are."

Still the detective did not answer, but he realized the truth. When he left Bergnam he had been too absent minded to perceive that the cabs had been changed, and this was the result. Bitterly enough he reproached himself for his inattention.

"He is still half-unconscious," declared one of the other men, "and now is our time to finish the job. Do as I ordered."

One of the men produced a long sack, another some cords, and they proceeded to bind the prisoner. The leader had expected resistance, but none was made. Considering how clear-headed Dorgan had again become this was peculiar. He was clear-headed; how much so may be seen when it is stated that in the leader of the party he had recognized one of the men who had been opposed to him when Brown, the man now in the station-house, tried his hand at kidnapping.

So this new trouble was due to the same parties, but they bade fair to be more successful this time.

There lay the sleuth, bound hand and foot,

and gagged in a primitive way. No friend could be relied upon to get Deep Duke out of his danger. That he was to be drowned like a dog he well realized.

He was thrust into the sack, and with that movement disappeared, it seemed certain, from the eyes of the world forever. It was of stout material, commonly called burlap, and when the mouth had been tied, the kidnappers regarded their work as practically done.

"Now hustle around and finish the job," ordered the leading man. "Jim and Sam, go out and get all ready. Don't forget the weight."

"Where is it?"

"Didn't you see where I put it?"

"No."

"Then I'll go with you. Tom, you stay here."

The trio went out and proceeded to "finish the job." A heavy stone was loaded into the cab, and various other things done to aid in the work they had on hand. This done, they returned to the little room and paid attention to their prisoner. The bag was lifted, carried to the cab and thrown in, and then Jim threw open the stable-door, which had been closed when their prisoner was brought in.

"Don't forget to use caution," the leader urged, showing some apprehension.

"Oh! we'll be fly," Jim assured.

"Don't drive fast and court attention, and when you get to the boat, do your job up quickly."

"All right."

So saying Jim mounted to the box, Sam entered the cab with the man in the sack, and the vehicle rolled out of the stable. The leader watched it out of sight, and then turned to his remaining companion.

"A confounded delicate job," he observed. "I hope they won't bungle it, for if that cursed sleuth gets loose again he will make it hot for us all. He's got poor Brown in quod, and I suppose he'd like the rest of us."

Sam was thinking about the same thing as he sat in the cab, his knees touching the bagged-up man. The latter did not seem reconciled to his position, and squirmed about a good deal, but Sam had strong arms and he held him tight.

"I'll be glad when the blamed critter is in the river!" he muttered, bestowing a kick on the prisoner. "That's the only safe place for a detective."

In due time the cab rolled out on a pier—a dark, deserted place; and Jim and Sam decided that the "coast was clear." They hurriedly lifted out their burden and lowered him to a boat which they had had waiting. This had not been done without some trouble, for he kicked and squirmed about like an eel, but, once in the boat, Sam sat on the sack while Jim pulled out into the river.

Owing to the darkness they were not likely to be observed, and considering their purpose, Duke Dorgan's chances of seeing the dawn of another day seemed small.

When they had gone what seemed a proper distance Jim ceased rowing and Sam arose. Then the man in the sack began to squirm all the harder, and a muffled voice sounded from his place of captivity.

"Chuck him over!" said Jim, angrily. "He'll be yellin' out, yet. Is the stone tied to him?"

"Yes."

"Then over he goes!"

They began to lift, but, just then, the "mouth of the sack was burst open and an audible voice issued therefrom:

"Hold on!" it said. "For heaven's sake hold on. I ain't the detective—I am Tom Perry!"

Jim and Sam started back in dumfounded surprise. They knew that voice; they knew the speaker; but how to account for his presence they did not know. The man in the sack was not Duke Dorgan, but one of their own comrades, and a man who had helped bag the detective! What meant this startling fact?

CHAPTER XXVII.

ANOTHER WOMAN IN THE CASE.

IF the men in the boat were surprised, their leader, who remained at the stable, had equal cause for amazement as he turned around after closing the door, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

His remark was promptly answered by the only man then remaining with him:

"That's about so!"

The kidnapper started and looked at the speaker more closely. The voice did not sound like Tom's, yet who else could have answered? His companion stepped into better light and coolly said:

"Yes, sir, you are about right; 'that cursed detective' would like the rest of you!"

The kidnapper recoiled. His companion was not his man, Tom, but Duke Dorgan, the detective!

The villain stood in dumfounded amazement. He had just put Dorgan in a sack and sent him to be cast into the river, yet here he was, alive, active, and looking very dangerous. In the name of all that was wonderful, what did it mean?

Before he had settled this point a revolver was at his head, and Dorgan's free hand rested on his shoulder.

"Quietly, now, Mr. Man," said the detective, as calm as ever. "Don't kick up any row, for you see that I hold the reins. You have played your cards and lost, and you perceive that I hold the 'joker.'"

He touched the revolver muzzle against the man's face and smiled pleasantly, but his expression suddenly grew stern and he sharply added:

"You are my prisoner! Don't dare to make any disturbance, or it will be the worse for you. Hold out your hands!"

The kidnapper was brave enough ordinarily, but he was still stupefied by his great surprise. He extended his hands without any clear idea of what he was doing, and in a moment more handcuffs were upon his wrists, and his last hope of resistance was gone.

"Queer world, this," pursued Duke, serenely. "A goes up and B comes down, and then the old machine reverses and the rest of the alphabet has a show. If you will excuse such a miserable play upon words and letters, I'll remark that I now think 'I' am up and 'U' are down."

By this time the man found his tongue and began to swear profusely, but Dorgan cut him short.

"Take it easy; you are in the toils and can't get out. The explanation is simple. You left me and 'Tom' in the little room yonder, together. I got out of the sack and put Tom in, in my place. You see, when your men tied me they made a mess of it, as I knew they would. I fooled them on my wrists, and they tied so loosely that, once in the sack, it was easy for me to get free. This done I used my pocket-knife and cut the string of the sack. When I came out I put Tom in. Of course he wanted to resist, but I knocked him down and the rest was easy. Possibly Tom will suffer by the exchange, but you see I am all right."

"What cursed stupidity!" groaned the kidnapper.

"You *did* make a botch of it, but I find no fault. Now, let me ask why you kidnapped me?"

"I won't tell."

"Somebody set you on. Who?"

"I refuse to say a word."

"It will be better for you."

"Not one word!"

The kidnapper spoke doggedly, but Dorgan plied him with questions persistently. It was a vain effort, and the detective gave it up after some minutes. He was afraid the other men would return and turn the tide again.

Not caring to linger there, he opened the door and led his prisoner out. He expected strong objections to going to Jersey City, but not one was made. He took the man over the ferry, and soon had him in a cell near Brown, the other prisoner. There he once more tried to induce him to talk, but with as poor luck as before.

The fellow would not explain anything.

Giving it up, at last, Dorgan went home. He had come out of his latest adventure with colors flying, but he saw the need of greater caution in future. His enemies were determined to get him out of the way, and he must be on his guard at every point.

However, he hoped to soon bring the Woodside case to a close, and then his prisoners would get their deserts for attacking him, if nothing more.

He did not forget the appointment at the minister's house the next day, and at the stipulated hour he found his way to that place. Mr. Bergnam was already there, and Dorgan was soon with him and Mr. Oates.

The minister was a pleasant, benevolent-looking old gentleman, and when he was asked if he remembered the Archibald Woodside whom he recommended to Bergnam, he promptly answered that he did.

"I think, however, that I made a bad mistake in recommending him," he added. "Woodside turned out badly."

"In what way?" Dorgan asked.

"The scamp ran away and left his wife."

"His wife!" echoed the detective.

"Yes."

"Did you know her?"

"I did, and do. She has been a member of my church for thirty years—ever since I've preached in Jersey City."

"And still lives here?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Oates, may I ask you to tell what you know about her, and about Woodside?"

"Certainly, though it is precious little I know about him—I wish I had known less. When I came to my present church one of the members thereof was a dressmaker, whose name was Agnes Benson. She was about twenty-six years old, and unmarried."

"I found her an estimable woman, though one of ordinary education and mental ability. Some years later, about 18—, I think, she came to me to be married, and I performed the ceremony. The groom's name was Archibald Woodside. They were married, and I occasionally saw him, though he never attended day-service. Sometimes he was at the evening prayer-meeting."

"Finally she came to me, and asked me to

recommend her husband, he was out of work, and wanted a position. I did so, and he went to Bergnam's. That recommendation taught me the worse than folly of recommending a man of whom my personal knowledge was small—a too-common mistake among business and public men."

"At that time I knew nothing against Woodside; I took the wife's word that he was honest and capable; but he soon opened all our eyes. He deserted his wife, and has never since been seen or heard from by her or any of us. That is why I say he was a scamp."

"And his wife, *nee* Agnes Benson, is still living?" questioned Dorgan.

"Yes."

The detective was silent for several moments. This revelation put a new aspect to the case. He had never before supposed Woodside to be a bigamist, for Claudia's mother was dead when the Mrs. Zachary Rose of Bangor became his wife, but this changed the appearance of things greatly. The professor's legal wife had been living when Agnes Benson nominally became Mrs. Woodside.

Truly, the further Dorgan investigated, the darker the case became.

"Mr. Oates," he finally added, "have you ever met Professor Archibald Woodside?"

"No; though, of course, I know him well by reputation. He would hardly be proud of his namesake."

"Scarcely," Duke dryly replied. "Now, sir, do you think you would recognize your Woodside if you were to see him now?"

"Certainly. I never forget a face."

"I would like to see Mrs. Agnes Woodside."

"You can, and shall, for she is in my house at this moment. She has done Mrs. Oates's dressmaking for years. I will call a servant and summon her."

Dorgan sat in silence while this was being done. The case was widening as he proceeded, and seemed to grow formidable. There was only one way in which Professor Woodside could have been the Woodside known to Mr. Oates. The man of science had then, or, rather, a part of the time, been living with Claudia's mother, and to have figured as Agnes Benson's husband, he must have lived a double life.

Such things he knew were not unheard of, but—

The dressmaker's entrance interrupted his meditations.

She was a tall, slender, sad-faced woman, plainly of ordinary ability, yet with a degree of refinement. Duke at once set her down as an honest, true woman.

Mr. Oates opened conversation delicately, and she was not averse to talking. She told what she knew about her runaway husband.

"I made a great mistake in marrying him," she said with a sigh, "but he gained my confidence and I went on blindly. He neglected me from the first, but specious excuses about business made me overlook his frequent absences."

"Do you mean that he did not remain at home much, after your marriage?" the detective asked.

"That is it, exactly. We boarded at my sister's, or I did, at least; he seldom was there at meal-time, but he did not average over three nights at home during a week. He explained all this under a plea of business, and I was blind for a long time. I ought to have suspected, for he often came during the day and stayed a few hours, but still there was the old explanation—business. As he said that he was agent for a New York house, and in and out of town as his employers sent him, this did not seem strange then."

It did not seem strange to Duke Dorgan. Here was what looked like positive proof of a double life. The professor had had two wives, and had divided his time between them.

Upon this theory it was easy to build the whole case.

"Would you recognize your husband if you were to see him again, Mrs. Woodside?"

"Why, of course."

"Then I would like to have you, Mr. Oates and Mr. Bergman, go with me to see a certain man who, I think, will prove to be your husband."

Mrs. Woodside demurred. He had basely deserted her, and if he was alive, well, and living in Jersey City, it was all the more reason why she should never again see so unworthy a person.

Dorgan, however, carried the point, and the quartet left the house and started for the professor's. That hemmed-in person certainly appeared to be at the end of his rope!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A MATTER OF IDENTITY.

DUKE DORGAN had a definite plan in view. He did not by any means intend to take all this tribe into Professor Woodside's house. He believed he had good reasons for conducting the matter secretly, and he had a way arranged to do this.

He knew that the residence adjoining Woodside's was just then unoccupied, and that, though a high, tight board fence separated the two, there was a connecting door in the fence.

His idea was to take his companions through this place, secrete them in the thick shrubbery of Woodside's grounds, and then bring the professor within view.

As he had seen Woodside outside the house in the forenoon, he did not think this would be difficult.

Their journey took them near Agnes Benson Woodside's home, and when she asked permission to call and add her sister to the party, Dorgan promptly agreed. Agnes had grown nervous, and such company would be beneficial. Besides, this sister had known the Woodside of old very well, and hers would be another opinion on was the case of identity.

Consequently, the sister was taken along.

The detective led the party by the route he had planned. Nobody opposed their entrance to the grounds of the unoccupied house, and they had soon passed the fence and found a hiding-place in the rear of Woodside's residence.

It was clear that Oates and Bergnam now suspected whom they were to see, but they held their peace. They knew, though Mrs. Woodside did not, that a detective was leading them, and they submitted to all, unpleasant though it was to them.

"Now," said Dorgan, when ready to leave them, "I want to give you a word of caution. I hope to bring within twenty feet of you—say to yonder rustic seat—the man whom I believe is Mrs. Woodside's husband. I shall talk to him on trivial matters, but I want you to look at him sharply, and notice the sound of his voice."

"We will obey," Oates answered.

"One thing more. Should he prove to be your Archibald Woodside, some of you may become excited. Now, it is my earnest wish that my man shall return to the house without a suspicion of this ambushade. You must all remain as silent as the grave, no matter who he proves to be."

"I understand," said Mrs. Woodside, perceiving that he looked straight at her. "You are afraid I will become excited, and spring from cover, if it is he. Have no fear; I do not want to recover my runaway husband, and I shall take good care that he does not see me."

Dorgan looked pleased, and then, after a few words further, retraced his steps through the grounds of the next residence, reached the street, and then made his entrance to the Woodside grounds in the most matter-of-fact way possible.

James answered his ring, and he asked to see the professor. An answer soon came; the master of the house was in his study and would be pleased to see him.

Woodside met him at the study door. The two men looked straight into each other's eyes. The professor evidently made an effort to seem frank and bold, but there was a shade of defiance in place of bravery, and a tremor of his eyes—an anxious air over all—which Dorgan was not slow to read.

The professor wanted to appear well, but he was mentally asking himself: "Am I in danger from this man? Does he suspect?" He was trying to read his fate in Dorgan's face, even while outwardly solicitous to appear only as a courteous and pleasant host.

The detective, however, was smiling frankly, kindly.

Greetings over, Woodside abruptly said:

"Mr. Dorgan, I owe you thanks for ridding us of those wretches yesterday. You went so abruptly that I had no chance to say so then, but I am very grateful."

"You are quite welcome, professor, and I enjoyed giving Peters a metaphorical black eye. He is a wretch."

"Is—is he a—detective?" was the hesitating reply.

"Private detective, I suppose, but a mere blackmailer. One of these days he'll go to prison to stay. Don't let him trouble you—I've scared him off. By the way, that's a curious little machine you have there."

It was a scientific instrument, and though Dorgan did not care a picayune for it, he had managed to change the subject of conversation. He soon made a plausible errand by supposing a scientific point, on which he wanted Woodside's opinion, and as they went on, it was clear that the latter's suspicions had about vanished.

Later, Dorgan spoke of a new house he was to build, and of the plan of the connecting grounds, and so led the conversation that the professor spoke of his own grounds, and offered to show the visitor just how they were arranged.

Victory was perched on Dorgan's banner; he could now show the professor to the persons in ambush without alarming him; and he went out with Woodside to make the test. They went over the grounds at once. The professor had never been more anxious to be obliging, for of all men he felt that he needed to disarm Dorgan of possible hostility most, and he talked steadily, pointing out each feature and commenting on it.

Duke had no trouble in inducing him to sit down on the desired rustic seat, and for ten minutes they remained close to the ambushade. Not a sound from that quarter told of those in hiding.

The detective did not test their endurance too much, but getting Woodside away, soon bade him good-day and retired from his premises. He then conducted his allies to the street, and they went to Mrs. Woodside's sister's.

Not a question was asked nor an explanation made until they reached there. Then Duke turned upon his companions.

"Well?" he questioned.

"It was my husband!" said Agnes, in a tremulous voice.

"What?" cried the sister.

"I said that the person Mr. Dorgan showed us was my husband, Archibald Woodside."

"Why, Agnes, are you insane?"

"Insane! What do you mean, Myra?"

"I mean that that person was not your husband."

It was Agnes's turn to look surprised, but Dorgan turned to the others.

"What have you to say, gentlemen?"

"It was the Archibald Woodside once employed by me," said Bergnam, "and the man recommended to me by Mr. Oates."

"Begging your pardon," said the minister, "I never recommended the man to you in the world. He don't look any more like that Archibald Woodside than I do like Christopher Columbus."

"Why, Mr. Oates!" exclaimed Agnes, "you ought to know the man to whom you married me."

"So I should, were I to see him."

"But the man Mr. Dorgan showed us was my husband."

"You must be crazy, Agnes," said her sister. "He did not resemble your husband in the least."

"Not in the least," added Mr. Oates.

"An error on your part," put in Bergnam. "It was Woodside, and he has not changed a particle."

"I think I ought to know my own husband," said Mrs. Woodside, with some spirit.

Duke Dorgan looked at the quartette in perplexity. The case had not grown clear, as he hoped, but had become even more complicated. Here were four witnesses whom he could not but believe honest and sincere, and their testimony exactly contradicted each other.

All of them ought to know positively, yet they differed to the extreme.

He proceeded to talk the matter over with them, but all to no purpose. Not one would swerve from the expressed opinion. All had had a good view of Professor Woodside, yet they had seen with eyes that could not agree.

Mrs. Woodside seemed to be the one upon whose word the most dependence could be put, for, as she said, she certainly ought to know her husband if any one did; but on the other side was the minister, who asserted that he remembered the old-time Woodside well, and he declared that the professor did not resemble him in the least.

Dorgan thus had the material to "prove" whatever he wished, but that was not his purpose. What he wanted were the facts in the case—the truth.

He was forced to conclude that Mr. Oates and Myra were mistaken, for all outside evidence went to corroborate the other side of the question. The date of the desertion of Agnes by her husband corresponded to that of the professor's alleged trip to Europe, and it did seem that this last part was a fraud—a device to blind others—and that the professor was also the other Archibald Woodside.

Taking this view of the matter, all seemed plain.

He had never been the model man he was supposed to be, but had deliberately committed bigamy by marrying Agnes Benson when his acknowledged wife was alive.

When Temple Hathaway was killed—killed perhaps in a moment of passion—he fled to Bangor, assumed the name of Zachary Rose, and married Eunice Eastman, the Mrs. Rose of our story.

There was one inconsistency about all this. Why should Woodside, with all his wealth, have gone to work for Bergnam, since this must have been an impediment, rather than an aid, to the successful leading of a double life, and why did he become a log-driver on the rivers of Maine, when he might have taken along money enough to live in luxury if he wished.

The more the case was considered, the more perplexing it became.

The conversation was prolonged for some time, for Dorgan was anxious to bring order out of chaos, but all in vain. His companions were firm, and an agreement was out of the question. He finally gave it up for the time being, and the party broke up.

Mrs. Woodside spoke to the detective outside the door.

"Is there danger that I shall be called into court in this matter, whatever it is?" she asked.

"There is a possibility of it."

"Save me from that if you can. I never want to look upon Archibald Woodside's face again."

"You forget that he is rich."

"I forget nothing; but were he the richest man alive I would never forgive him. I will

never make peace with him, nor accept one cent of his money. Do not take this as a mere exhibition of temper; I am not acting viciously. The idea is, he deserted me basely, and I am done with him forever!"

Dorgan looked after her thoughtfully as she moved away.

"She is at least sincere. She is not pretending to recognize the professor as her husband to get his money, for she will not touch it. Yes, she's plainly sincere—but so were the others. The case is complicated, and though many men would make an arrest at once, I am going deeper into it. My next step must be to trace the professor, if possible, from the time he pretended to go to Europe."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A PAINFUL CHOICE OF EVILS.

CLAUDIA WOODSIDE felt as though she was living over a volcano, and every moment she expected it to break forth and overwhelm her and those she loved in ruin.

She had not received any explanation of the motive of the visit of Peters and his companions, nor dared she seek light. True, she had once asked her father, but she was glad now that she had not been answered as she felt he might, if he would, have answered her.

She dared not know the truth.

Despite her father's denial, she felt that he knew the motive of that visit, and that it was one which threatened him with ruin. She watched him as closely as possible, fearing that he might again attempt suicide, but he was firmer and calmer than she had dared expect.

To all the rest was added Ralph Hathaway's conduct, and she felt that her cup of sorrow was full. She no longer felt resentment because he remained away, however—she now hoped he would not come.

The more she meditated concerning the letters found in the cabinet—those from Temple Hathaway to her father—the more she felt that there might be good reason for Ralph's course.

What that reason was she dared not consider.

Painful as was her position she bore it nobly, ever managing to be cheerful in her father's presence, and loading him with kindness and tender care, but the weight of her fears was something terrible to bear alone.

She did not think of sharing it with any one. Her brother was not the kind of a man to meet an emergency. True, Philip was honest and, in his way, devoted to both her and her father, but his nature was indicated by his course in the early part of the case.

When he heard of Mrs. Rose he was all zeal and enthusiasm; he engaged Dorgan and wanted—for a few hours—to become an amateur detective; but some new fever had attacked him, and he gave no more thought to Mrs. Rose and Dorgan.

At present he was considering a hunting-trip to the Far West; perhaps the next week he would plan to go to the North Pole, or cross Africa on a bicycle.

No; Philip was not the man to confide in. He would probably laugh at her, pronounce her fears groundless, and go to a horse trot, or get a fever to help the poor of New York, instead of showing himself an aid and protector.

So Claudia kept her own counsel and worried alone.

She saw Duke Dorgan when he called and expected the worst from the visit, but her father returned to the house looking more cheerful than since his trouble began, and the danger seemed averted.

Half an hour later the servant announced a caller to see her. Who was it? She glanced at the card in her hand.

"Ralph Hathaway!"

The girl's face flushed, and then grew unusually pale. What did this visit portend? She remembered Ralph's last call, and feared the worst. Even if there had been a change in his feelings, was it her place to receive him as though nothing had happened? The resolution was soon made, and she went quietly down to see him.

He rose as she entered the parlor, and the gravity of her face was reflected in his own. She paused, and they looked at each other in silence for a moment. It was a strange meeting for parties so lately married, but Claudia would not make it otherwise. An apology on his part was certainly due.

"You do not seem glad to see me, Claudia," said Ralph, in a low and by no means steady voice.

"Can you expect anything more?"

"I hoped you would ask the question. No, I can expect no more. Whatever cause I have had for my behavior, I have done wrong to you. Nothing could excuse me for using you as I have when you are wholly innocent of wrong-doing."

The confession was made in a manly way, but Claudia's manner was still dignified and reserved as she asked:

"Then why have you done so?"

"I have come to tell you that—if you wish."

"I not only wish it, but it is your duty to tell me."

"Some things are better left unsaid, Claudia," as the somber reply.

"I am your wife."

"Ay, and by that tie you have a right to hear what I would almost rather die than say."

His husky voice and pallid face startled the girl. He had the appearance of one suffering keenly, and, beset with fears, the more terrible because they were vague, she grew weak and dropped into a chair.

Both had been standing; she now motioned him to a seat with a trembling hand.

"I presume," she said, faintly, "that it is better I should know all."

"I believe in my heart 'tis better you should not know. Is it, or is it not? That is the question I have debated until my head has grown light, and my reason almost been thrown from its balance. Is it best, or is it not?"

He seemed to have forgotten her presence, and muttered the words looking gloomily at vacancy.

"I am your wife," she repeated.

"Yes, and I have told myself you had a right to know, terrible though it is. There was another reason—one which, I confess, influenced me more than any other. I thought that you would despise me, and that drove me almost mad. I decided to come, and then, if you said so, to tell all."

"Ralph, this suspense is terrible. Speak!"

"Will you despise me, afterward?"

"I am sure I shall not."

"Perhaps you will drive me away—refuse ever to see me again."

"Ralph," she cried, sharply, "delay no longer. Speak at once, for I shall go mad if you do not. I fear—the worst!"

"You cannot fear as much as you will hear."

"Speak!"

She had never been paler, and her hand was pressed over her heart convulsively. She did fear the worst—she remembered the letters she had found in the cabinet—and a terror had fallen upon her which seemed too great to be borne.

"You shall hear all," Ralph gloomily replied, "and in the end, if you blame me for telling, remember that I speak only because you are my wife, and—forgive me if you can! Claudia, you remember that Professor Woodside sent me to my mother for the story of my father's life?"

"Yes."

"I learned it from her. She told me that the world said that Temple Hathaway died a defaulter and a suicide; but she also said this was not true."

"What did she tell you?"

"That my father was—murdered!"

"By whom?"

Claudia gasped rather than spoke the words.

"Dare I say?"

"Tell me all!"

"There was no witness to the deed, but my mother says the assassin was—your father!"

The terrible secret was out and a few moments of silence followed. Ralph had not seen Claudia even start, but there had been a deep, quick respiration, like a gasp, and he knew how the blow had gone home. He expected her to faint—to cry out—to do something even more startling, but there she sat like a marble statue.

Ralph Hathaway felt that he had better have died before that hour—before Claudia ever saw him—but the Rubicon had been passed; the secret was told.

"Claudia," he said, hoarsely, after a pause, "do not curse me for my words, and remember there was no witness; remember there is one hope. My mother may have been mistaken."

Claudia did not answer. She remembered the letters found in the old cabinet, and the suggestions contained in them. She remembered and shivered.

"Have I done wrong, Claudia?" Ralph humbly asked.

"You have done right to tell me all," she replied. "At least, you have cleared yourself, as was your duty, and I had a right to know. Tell me all!"

He told the story as he had heard it from his mother, and then added:

"Remember that there may have been a mistake. My mother relied on those dying words of my father, and he practically recalled them in his last moments. There may have been a mistake."

Claudia looked at him far more calmly than he dared hope. The heroic part of her nature was asserting itself, and though her heart seemed to lie like lead in her bosom, her self-control was remarkable.

"There must have been a mistake," she said, firmly. "My father is not the man to harm any one."

"Can't we prove this?" he eagerly asked.

"We can, at least, try."

"Claudia, do you blame me for telling you this?"

"Blame you? No; you have done perfectly right. It was your duty."

"And can you forgive my weak, unnatural, brutal treatment of you in the last few days?"

"Do not use such terms, Ralph. You were sorely beset, as I now see, and in this great emergency we must be nearer to each other than

ever before. I can no longer blame you; do not blame yourself."

"You are as noble as ever."

He bent over her, and a kiss was gravely exchanged. Both hearts were too full for utterance, and for several moments neither spoke. It was Claudia who spoke first.

"Ralph, we must be patient, and I trust that time will sweep the clouds away. At present I do not see that we can do anything but wait patiently, as I said before."

It was not a satisfactory way to leave the matter, but Ralph could not think of a better one. To him it seemed almost an impossibility to clear up a mystery buried under twenty years of time, but something might transpire to help them. As for Claudia, she wanted time to think before any decisive step was taken.

When Ralph finally took his departure the parting was gravely tender. Claudia watched him to the street; then she ran up-stairs to her own room, and took from their hiding-place the package of letters she had found in the cabinet.

She turned to the last and read it carefully.

It did not serve to reassure her. Written by Temple Hathaway to Professor Woodside, there was the charge in the dead man's hand-writing that Woodside's business scheme had been dishonest, and the intimation that the latter had threatened him was now startlingly suggestive.

If Ralph had seen that letter he would have regarded the worst as practically proven—he could not have believed otherwise.

"But I will not believe!" declared Claudia. "I will not believe anything against my father, who is so noble and good. And yet—yet—these dreadful papers!"

She shivered and sat a long time in deep thought. She had come to her room with the fixed intention of destroying these letters, but it seemed now that she would do an injustice to Ralph by so doing. His father's name was under a dark cloud, and if these letters were made public his reputation could be cleared.

But at what a cost! Her father's honor—perhaps, his life!

She had now to choose between two evils. If the papers were destroyed the act might sweep away the last hope of clearing Temple Hathaway's reputation, and Ralph would go on to the end of his life, brooding over the disgrace as only one of his sensitive nature could.

On the other hand, to make the papers public would be to ruin the father she had loved and respected, and regarded as the noblest of men.

"This shall never be!" she thought. "Come what may, my father must be protected. Even if I destroy my own hopes by the act, this terrible proof shall be swept away!"

She moved to the fire and threw the letters into the grate. The flames seized upon them greedily, and in a brief space of time they had shriveled and grown brown—the writing faded they shrank, and writhed, and fell away to ashes.

"It is done!" whispered Claudia. "For good or evil, I have put one terrible piece of evidence beyond the power of resurrection!"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE DETECTIVE'S EXPERIMENT.

THAT evening Duke Dorgan walked into the station-house and accosted the captain of the precinct.

"How is my friend Brown," he asked.

"Sulky as ever," the captain answered. "Do you know, Dorgan, I don't believe you will get that fellow to confess?"

"Why not?"

"First, because he has a good deal of backbone. Secondly, because he knows he can get only a light punishment for decoying you, while if he confesses, he may jump from the frying-pan into the fire."

"Just my idea. I've been afraid of it all along. Well, my second prisoner—he of the cab—what of him?"

"A second edition of Brown."

"Exactly! Well, I have a plan."

"Name it."

"I am going to visit the second man and try for a confession. I shall probably fail. If I do, I want to try an experiment."

"What is it?"

"I want Brown released."

"I think I see."

"Once released, he will have to go somewhere. Well, wherever he goes, I shall go, too, and I hope to run him to his hole and get a clew to the mystery. I shall disguise myself and dog him wherever he goes."

"That's all right, but let me give you a hint. Go well armed and look out for yourself. He may lead you into some den of cut-throats, and when the roll is called to-morrow your spirit may pop up and answer to your name—'Dead!'"

Despite his mode of expression the captain's manner was very serious, and it was plain that he meant all he said. If he read Brown rightly he was a desperate man, and, by following him, Dorgan might walk into the midst of some of the worst criminals of New York.

"Thanks for the warning," Duke replied, "but I'll take the risk. I need some little skirmish to warm up my blood."

He visited his second prisoner, but found him as obstinate as ever. Not an explanation would he make. Then Dorgan disguised himself as an old man, putting on ragged clothes and a white wig and false beard, and was ready for the next act in the drama.

He then took his stand outside the station-house, and waited for Brown to appear.

The captain of the precinct went to the cell and informed that person that, as the detective had failed to make any formal charge, they had decided to release him rather than board him for nothing any longer. He was free to go whenever he saw fit.

Brown saw fit to go at once, and was soon on the sidewalk. He paused there and seemed to hesitate, looked back to where he had last seen the captain, but seeing no one there, turned and walked down the street.

For several blocks he seemed fearful that he would be followed, for he frequently looked around, but he saw no one whom he was inclined to suspect. There were a good many other persons on the street, and he paid no attention to the white-bearded old man who was moving slowly along on the other sidewalk.

Nevertheless, Brown did not seem at his ease, and for some time his progress was slow and uncertain. Either he feared being dogged, or he was undecided where to go. His movements, slow as they were, eventually took him to the vicinity of the ferry, and when within fifty yards of it his manner suddenly changed.

Striking out briskly he walked to the ferry-house, paid his toll and passed inside. The boat was just on the point of starting for Christopher street, New York, and he hurried on board and sat down in the men's cabin.

An old man with a white beard had come aboard just after him. This man waited until the boat swung out of the slip, and then entered the ladies' cabin.

When the New York side was reached Brown took a Fourteenth street car and resumed his journey. The old man went to the expense of a cab, and gave the driver minute directions. The result was that the cab followed a block behind the car until Union Square was reached.

At University Place the old man dismissed his vehicle and walked briskly to the east. He was at hand when the car reached the end of its route, a few rods beyond.

Brown alighted, but at once took a Fourth avenue car and started south. The old man boarded the following car, which was close behind the first. In this way both rode to the Bowery, but after going a few blocks further, Brown alighted and passed into a street to the left.

The old man, otherwise Duke Dorgan, did the same.

The detective was convinced that he should soon run his game down. Brown was seeking a quarter of the metropolis where people of his grade were likely to be found, and there, too, might be the man, or men, who had set him upon Dorgan's track before.

Not far from the Bowery did the pursued go. He paused before a corner saloon, but did not enter it. Above the saloon were living rooms, which a dingy sign announced to be a "hotel," and after a cautious glance around he entered there.

"Very good!" thought the detective. "I have him in his den, and, in good truth, it looks like a den. Fit resort for all kinds of cut-throats, I should say. Well, I'm going in, just the same. The sign says it's a hotel, and I want to be accommodated."

He allowed two or three minutes to pass, and then walked boldly to the door and opened it. A stairway was visible beyond. He ascended.

What he found above confirmed all his suspicions. It was a narrow, poorly lighted, ill-appearing place, and it was plain that though it claimed to be a hotel, it was a mere "dive." This did not trouble Dorgan, and, as no one appeared to challenge him, he prepared to find Brown. Voices were to be heard in various directions, but where was his man?

At first he could see but little in the dark hall, but he gradually became accustomed to the semi-darkness, and had just discovered that one door near him was marked "Office!" when the knob was rattled on the other side.

Dorgan stepped quickly back, and a man came out. It was Brown himself.

"I'll go up to the room," he said, to some one he was leaving, and then closed the door and ascended another flight of stairs.

The detective did not propose to lose sight of him again, and he followed as closely as he dared. Thus he soon saw Brown enter another room, and evidently, without himself being seen. The chase was narrowing down, and the next thing was to discover who was in the room.

At least two voices were to be heard.

A second door was to be seen near the first, and Duke determined to investigate at all hazards. He opened it cautiously. Darkness and silence were beyond, as far as the immediate vicinity was concerned, and he soon saw that the room was little more than a closet, but the voices from the next room were very distinct and he felt that he had made a lucky hit.

He passed inside and closed the door after him.

A little cautious investigation showed that the room was only about eight feet by twelve, and, though some sort of a carpet was on the floor, it was unfurnished.

He at once devoted his attention to listening, and was delighted to find all in his favor. Between him and the other room was only an ordinary partition, and the boards did not fit tightly at that.

Further search revealed the fact that only for wall-paper on the other side he would have a view of the other room, and his resolution was at once made. He drew his pocket-knife, thrust the blade through a crack and cut a slit in the paper.

A ray of light at once penetrated his quarters.

He peered through.

Two men were visible, and he at once recognized them; they were Brown and the private detective, Levi Peters. Dorgan felt then that he had made no mistake in letting either man go free. If nothing disastrous occurred, something important was likely to come of this interview. He listened eagerly.

"He is pretty sure to be in, ain't he?" Brown asked.

"I should say so," Peters answered.

"I want to see him at once."

"You have been working for him, haven't you?"

"Never mind," said Brown, cautiously. "I'm not the party to tell tales out of school."

"He is a sly rat, the old man is."

"People need to be sly in this world."

"Rather."

"I'm afraid you are too sly."

"How so?"

"You are a detective, and, square as you pretend to be, I don't trust you any too much."

Dorgan did not hear Peters's reply. He had something else to engage his attention just then. From the time when he settled down, and ceased making noise, he had heard another sound near him. Something seemed moving close at hand, and, when he tried to convince himself that the noise was due to rats, he heard another sound which was very like human breathing.

He had turned his head and looked sharply, and, gradually, he made out the shape of a dark figure. The breathing came from that quarter, and Dorgan realized the truth. There was another person in the little room with him, and between him and the door!

CHAPTER XXXI.

HEMMED IN BY ENEMIES.

THE detective was by this time fully on the alert. He could not expect to find a friend in the dive, so the person in the little room with him must be set down as an enemy. More than this, the unknown was aware of Dorgan's presence, and that he was acting the spy on those in the next room.

There was nothing but trouble and danger to expect from such a person, but the detective remained as cool as ever. It was in the unknown's power to raise his, or her, voice in shouts which would soon alarm the gang, but Dorgan did not propose to let him creep out and give the alarm secretly.

If necessary, this person must be dealt with vigorously.

He muffled his revolver under his coat as much as possible; and pulled back the hammer. Despite his precaution a distinct double click followed, however, and he lost no time in bringing matters to a crisis.

With a light spring he gained the unknown's side, and then, seizing him with one hand, he thrust the revolver against his head with the other.

"Silence! Utter one word and you are a dead man!" he said, in a low, but thrilling, voice.

He did not propose to alarm the whole house by firing the revolver, but it was well to make his threat as sweeping as possible.

Somewhat to his surprise there was no resistance on the part of the unknown, but in the same cautious manner the latter replied:

"Hol' on! Hol' on, boss! I ain't no intention o' makin' a rumpus. Don't shoot! Put up that barker afore it goes off an' gives me a pill in the brain-pan."

"What are you doing here?"

"'Bout the same you be, I guess."

"What do you mean?"

"Ef I ain't wrong you're the man who wos in the sullen with me, an' went inter the sewer."

"What! are you Abe Benlow?"

"I'm that 'denticle chap."

"And alive, after all."

"Ruther. I went inter the sewer, an' had the wu'st time on record, but I've come up smilin'."

"What are you doing here? Is this one of your dives?"

"Not much! No, sir—I tracked 'em hyar."

"Tracked whom?"

"Peters an' Daddy Posey."

"Well, why are you in this closet?"

"Playin' the spy, like you be."

There was an air of sincerity about what the fellow said, and Dorgan was inclined to place confidence in him. True, he was as little to be trusted in general as a rattlesnake, but he could have no love for Peters since the adventure in the cellar, when Abe and Dorgan so nearly lost their lives.

The above conversation had been carried on so guardedly that there was no reason to suppose they had been heard, but Duke would not stop then to ask why Abe was acting the spy. Too much of what was being said in the next room had already been lost.

"Abe," he said seriously, "if you are all you pretend—and we ought not to be enemies after our adventure together the other day—you ought to be willing to stay here by me, behaving like a man, and willing to chip in with me if we get discovered."

"Boss, I'll do all that with pleasure. I am hankerin' ter get square with Peters. I visited Sam Loonsby's old ark yesterday an' knocked him silly; now, I'm arter Peters. Only give me the chance, an' I'll stick ter you like a brother."

"It's a bargain."

Dorgan did not want Abe as a "brother," but he had much rather have the big rough for, than against, him just then. The alliance pleased him.

Once more he turned his attention to the next room, but conversation had ceased. Peters was reading a paper, and Brown sat by the window idly drumming upon the glass with his fingers.

"Who are they waiting for?" he cautiously asked of Abe.

"Dunno—wish I did. I know Daddy Posey took Peters here to see somebody—but you don't know Daddy."

"Yes, I do; I saw him at Loonsby's. What use can he be to Peters?"

"Haven't a ghost o' an' idee, an' that's why I come in hyar; hoped ter see who Peters wanted ter see."

"Where is Daddy Posey?"

"Dunno; down in ther bar-room, most likely."

"How would it work to capture him and try for an explanation?"

"I'm 'feared 'twould be no good. Daddy is a mum old chap, an' hard ter squeeze."

There was a brief silence, and then Abe added:

"Say, I hear that Professor Woodside accidentally shot hisself t'other day. How is he now?"

Dorgan looked sharply at his companion.

"You keep well-informed as to Woodside, don't you?"

"I try ter."

"I will make it worth your while to tell me all you know about him."

"Great Scott! I don't know nothin' more than I tol' ye in the sullen. He was in Charles-town prison with me; that's all I know."

"You are sure he's the same man?"

"I'm certain on it. Now, boss, give me credit fur this. When I spoke out in the sullen I thought we was both goin' ter Kingdom Come on the gallop, but I'm tellin' the truth in cold blood now. Give me credit, won't yer?"

Dorgan had to smile at this naive argument, but he told Abe they would settle the matter later, and asked him to be silent for the present. Guardedly as they spoke, they might be overheard.

Half an hour passed without change in the next room. Peters and Brown waited, but their man did not come. They said but little, and that little showed that they were afraid of each other. Clearly, they were not comrades, though then on friendly terms.

The delay annoyed Dorgan, who saw time passing away at a rate which bade fair to make it useless for any of them to wait. Indeed, Peters and Brown several times referred to the lateness of the hour, and seemed reluctant to remain longer.

The men in the closet were keeping very quiet, and had begun to feel somewhat secure in their hiding-place, but they were not destined to escape without some excitement. Several times some one had passed through the hall, but they had become accustomed to this, though the fact that there was no way to fasten their door was not to their liking.

That it was dangerous was soon shown. There was another sound of steps in the hall, and then the door suddenly opened and a man stood there, light in hand.

A curious sight was presented to his gaze; there sat Dorgan and Abe on the floor, like a pair of Turks, and he gazed at them in blank wonder. Then a suspicious look flashed over his face.

"What the blazes be ye doin' here?" he demanded.

"This is our room," Abe replied, before Dorgan could frame a suitable reply.

"The dickens it is!"

"Yes."

"See hyar! that won't work. We don't let this room, an' I never seen either o' you afore."

"We're new parties."

"I should say so! Look hyar, be you tramps or spies?"

"I ain't no tramp, you big loafer!" began Abe, angrily, but the stranger interrupted him:

"Then you're spies. I reckon I know how ter deal with the likes o' you!"

He slipped two fingers inside his mouth, and Duke knew that a shrill whistle would in a moment more go ringing through the building. This must be prevented at all hazards; it might mean ruin to them. Quick as a flash the detective sprung forward, tore down the man's hand and thrust forward a revolver.

"Silence!" he exclaimed, in a low, but energetic voice. "Don't dare to make a row or I will fire!"

Unfortunately for him the man was not one who scared easily. In an instant he sent out one foot against the thin partition which divided the closet from the room in which Peters and Brown were, and the force knocked one board from its place as though a cannon-ball had hit it. It fell in the other room, while at almost the same moment the stranger's voice rung out loudly:

"Here, this way! Help! There's a spy—"

He got no further. It was not a time for parleying, and as Dorgan's hand closed over his throat, Abe added his mite by hitting the fellow a blow so tremendous that he was knocked out of Dorgan's grasp and extended at full length on the floor.

There was a rattling in the next room which showed that Peters and Brown were astir.

"We've got ter git!" cried Abe.

"Come on, then!"

They dashed from the room together.

"Pard, we're in the swim tergether?" questioned Abe.

"Sure."

"All right. Then we'll fight our way, b'—gosh!"

His sturdy bravery gave the detective a better opinion of him, and he had no chance to express it then. They were at the top of the stairs, and a commotion all along the floor showed that that part of the house was aroused. The rest would be in a very short time.

Down the stairs they went quickly, but when near the foot, the "office" door was opened and out poured half a dozen men. Enough light shone on the scene to show the rival parties each other, and the gang blocked the way.

"Hallo!" cried the man at the front, "what's the row up there?"

"Two men in a fight," said Duke, promptly.

"Who are they?"

"Don't know."

"Wal, who in thunder be you?"

"We were up there visiting a friend."

"Don't ye b'lieve it!" shouted a voice at the head of the stairs, and down came their former adversary. "They're blamed spies—don't let 'em escape!"

Dorgan sprung aside, placed his back to the wall, and drew a revolver.

"I don't want any row here," he coolly said, "but I will make it hot for whoever molests me. Keep off!"

"Me, too!" cried Abe Benlow. "I'm a fightin' man, ev'ry inch, an' I'll chew up whoever treads on me."

"Hold on!" ordered a new voice. "Give me a word here. I know that man!"

Duke looked around quickly. Peters had come nearly down-stairs, and now stood with one finger leveled at the peril-surrounded adventurers.

"They are spies, and I can swear to it," he added. "That man is Duke Dorgan, the detective!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

DEEP DUKE CALLS ON DADDY POSEY.

DARK, fierce and hostile were the glances bent upon Deep Duke and Abe, but the detective did not show the least sign of fear. He had faced danger a good many times before, and though it was clear that these men were his natural enemies—natural, because they hated any one who represented the law—he faced them coolly.

Another thing—he determined, then and there, that Levi Peters should go with him to prison. He had allowed the man freedom with the hope that he would injure, more than help, his own cause, and Duke believed he had done it.

If, however, his visit of the evening was in connection with the Woodside case, it was time to bring him to a halt. He might be learning too much. Clearly, the proper way was to get Peters behind the bars, and then devote attention to Daddy Posey.

This old vagabond, erstwhile deemed so insignificant, now assumed more imposing form. He had guided Peters to the dive to see somebody. Who was it? This was what Duke wished to know, and when Peters was out of the way he could pay attention to Daddy Posey.

Bold and fearless as ever, he had an answer ready to Peter's last dramatic revelation.

"Yes, I am Duke Dorgan!" he coolly replied.

"What of it? Who dares say I have not a right to go and come as I see fit? I do that, anyhow, and I call your attention to the fact that I am able to care for myself. Now, if the master of this house is here, I want to say a word to him."

"Wal, I'm him," said one of the gang.

"Good! Spoken like a man. Well, my friend, you and I need not have trouble. I am

not here to molest you, or raid your house, or bring either into public view. Don't be afraid of that."

"I thought you'd take water."

"Take water?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"You are scared, an' want ter git out by a trick—"

"That's a lie!" Dorgan bluntly replied. "If you think I am afraid of you and your cronies you make a mighty big blunder—that's all. I am giving you the truth; I don't want you or any of your friends, but there is one man here I do want."

By this time Peters had come to the foot of the stairs, and stood waiting to put in his word. His eyes were twinkling evilly, and it was clear that he intended to do Dorgan harm by some ready lie, but he was not prepared for what followed.

Dorgan made a quick leap, reached the side of his rival, and seized him in a tenacious grasp.

"And I have him!" he said, finishing his last speech.

Then he turned sharply to the amazed villain. "You are my prisoner, Levi Peters. Don't dare resist, or it will be the worse for you. Men, I am a detective, but this fellow is one, also. Take your choice between us. He is a sneak and a coward, while I claim to be a man of my word. I tell you again I have nothing against any of you. Take your choice between us!"

And Duke flung away his wig and false beard and towered before them, bold, handsome, frank and impressive.

There is nothing which affects people of low life more than cool bravery when it is properly carried, and Dorgan reached the crowd at a bound, figuratively speaking. Opposed to him was the private detective, whose manner just then certainly corroborated the charge that he was a "sneak," and the tide rolled in Dorgan's favor.

"Better take his advice, Dixon," said a voice from the crowd.

"It sounds straight," added another.

"It is straight," said Dorgan.

"Don't you believe it—"

Thus far had Peters spoken, trying to get in his word, but the master of the house interrupted.

"I've got ter b'lieve somebody," he said, "an' I'll take my chances with Dorgan. Mister, you're welcome ter this chap if you want him; I never seen him afore, an' he ain't one o' my kind. Take him if you want him."

"I won't go!" cried Peters. "This is New York; I won't go to Jersey without—"

"Easy, old man!" coolly interrupted Duke. "Better go quietly—you remember what I know about you!"

Peters actually grew pale. He was terribly afraid of his bold rival, and the gang he had relied upon had gone against him. When he put in his word they had been ready to tear Dorgan to pieces, but the latter had handled them like pieces on a chess-board, and won a victory where defeat seemed inevitable.

"Better take him off at once," said Dixon.

Dorgan turned to his rival with a calm smile.

"How is it, Levi—will you go?" he asked.

The private detective looked at the row of faces before him, and then turned sullenly away.

"Have it as you will!" he growled.

"That's horse sense. Well, Mr. Dixon, I won't stay to disturb you further, but I thank you for your square treatment. You won't lose anything by it."

And then he marched Peters out with Abe Benlow as a rear guard. The big rough was in great glee, and he chuckled audibly as they went to the street. He thought he had never seen a neater piece of work, and it had been accomplished by means new to him. He was accustomed to win, if at all, by using his muscle, not strategy.

Straight to Jersey City went the party, and Peters was soon accommodated with quarters in a cell. Dorgan did not intend to let him go out again until the Woodside case was settled. Affairs were at a crisis, and Peters might win the game if he was given a chance.

Abe showed a desire to attach himself to the detective, for whom he now had a profound admiration, and as all sorts of men are useful in an officer's career, Duke did not discourage him.

The man might yet be useful, and he could be kept in service without being made an intimate.

When his work was done Dorgan went home and retired. As usual, he slept well. Having a remarkably well-balanced nature, he could return from the most exciting adventure, forget it, settle down and sleep without the shadow of a care to disturb him.

When he arose in the morning it was with the intention of seeing Daddy Posey at once. This old man, who had seemed so insignificant when Dorgan saw him in Sam Loonsby's cellar, had suddenly assumed new, though vague, importance in the detective's mind.

He might prove to be as insignificant as he

had seemed, but Dorgan had a presentiment that it would be the reverse.

On the way he took in the cell of the man who had kidnapped him in the cab, but, as he had expected, this person still refused to talk. Duke was sure that he dared not speak; by so doing he would probably get himself into even a worse fix.

Next, the detective started to find Daddy Posey. As he reached the dreary court he could not but be influenced by his previous experience there, and he touched his revolver to make sure that it was there. He was going among desperate men, and those who had once tried to take his life. If Sam Loonsby's little game had not failed, the detective would then have been a mangled corpse in the sewer.

He entered the old house bold y, however.

He had expected to make inquiries in order to find Daddy Posey, but luck was in his favor. The old man sat in a chair in the hall, fast asleep.

Dorgan awakened him at once.

The old man started up with an air of alarm, and then gazed at the caller without seeming reassured. He did not recognize the man he had seen in the cellar, though he still wore Duke's coat, but he had a knave's fear of inquisitive strangers.

"Hallo! how are you to-day, Daddy?" Duke bluffly said, with a friendly air.

"I'm well."

Daddy answered with a growl and a suspicious air.

"You're looking as chipper as ever."

"Um!" growled the old man, still on his guard.

"I've got something for you. A friend has sent you a trifle, and if you'll go to your room, I'll give it to you."

Daddy's eyes suddenly sparkled avariciously.

"What is it?"

"I'll tell you when we are in your room."

The old man put his fears aside. He was very favorably impressed by Dorgan's manner, and the chance that there might be money in the case was enough to stir him all up. His love for "sparklin' boys" had not decreased since he hunted in the cellar for coins.

He promptly led the way up two flights of stairs to a low, marvelously dirty room. Unknown to either man, other eyes saw them as they went. On the second floor they had attracted the attention of a man who looked at them suspiciously. He evidently saw more in this visit than Daddy Posey did, for, after a little hesitation, he crept up the other stairs and stationed himself at the door of the room they had entered, where he could overhear what was said.

He soon found enough to interest him.

Daddy Posey scarcely allowed himself time to close the door before he turned upon his visitor. "What've you brought me?" he eagerly asked.

Dorgan displayed a crisp bank-note.

"Only a trifle," he answered. "Five dollars is the figure."

The vagabond's eyes fairly glowed.

"Give it ter me," he exclaimed, putting out his hand.

"Moderately, my friend, moderately. You shall have it when you earn it, and you can earn it easily."

"What d'ye mean?"

"My friend wants a little information, and he will pay you for it. See? By the way, let's sit down."

Daddy Posey obeyed, but a disappointed, suspicious look had appeared on his face.

"What is't you want ter know?" he growled.

"Last night you guided a man to Dixon's."

The vagabond started, and he was not the only man who did so. The listener at the door had started even more, and he glared through the key-hole, which some vandal knife had greatly enlarged, like a cut-throat meditating massacre. His gaze was upon Duke Dorgan, and if ever murder was in a look it was in his.

"I don't know nothin' about Dixon's," cried Daddy Posey, "an' I didn't guide nobody nowhere."

"Softly! I saw you at Dixon's myself."

The statement was safe, and Duke made it boldly. Daddy squirmed uneasily in his seat. His shriveled face was very troubled—even frightened—and he looked at the detective as though he would much rather run than remain longer in the room.

The spy at the door muttered a curse. The last statement seemed to trouble him as much, and even more, than it did Posey.

"Now," continued the detective, "what my friend wants is to see the man you took Peters there to see. Tell me where this man is to be found, and this five-dollar note is yours."

"Rubbish, all rubbish!" exclaimed the old man. "I ain't the least idee what you're talkin' about; not the least."

"Now don't talk nonsense, for I have this matter down fine. When you guided Peters there you were followed all the way, and the case is clear. I don't want you to do any more than show me the man Peters wanted to see. Come, Daddy, five dollars don't grow on every bush."

He rattled the crisp note, but the bait did not

take as it did before. The old man shook his head.

"I ain't got nothin' to tell," he insisted.

"You are foolish."

"I can't tell w'ot ain't so."

"Nonsense! You talk like a child. Isn't five dollars good pay for showing me a man?"

"Tain't no use," declared the old man. "I won't tell, an' that's an end on't."

"I see you want to get into trouble," said Dorgan, sharply. "You want me to put on the screws and haul you up in court, don't you? I'll do it if you're obstinate. I mean business, Daddy Posey, and I am a detective. Now will you talk?"

The vagabond gasped for breath and cowered back in his chair. He was too badly frightened to speak or move.

Not so the man outside the door. He had seen and heard enough to make his eyes glitter ferociously, and he now drew a revolver and secretly cocked it. The hole in the door was large enough for his purpose, and he pushed the weapon forward and aimed at Dorgan. He intended to fire, and if he did, Duke was doomed!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE PRICE OF SILENCE.

CLAUDIA WOODSIDE continued to watch for signs of danger with unabating anxiety. She had destroyed the tell-tale papers which indicated that the professor had known Temple Hathaway, but not so easy could other dangers be swept away.

Her father had enemies who certainly believed that they had knowledge that would make him their slave, and she was sure that this evidence referred to the Hathaway affair.

When they would renew their attack on him she did not know, but the blow might fall at any moment, so she watched over her father with unwavering care. Nor was she wholly satisfied with his outward cheerfulness; every moment that he was alone in his study was one of anxiety and suspense to her.

She dreaded a renewal of his attempt on his own life.

He pretended to be as busy as ever over his scientific pursuits, but, several times when she had gained a secret view of his room, she had found him seated in his chair, evidently brooding over some trouble.

The day after the events of the last chapter, Claudia was alone in the grounds back of the mansion when the sound of other feet caused her to turn quickly.

Alone? No; she was not alone. Five yards away stood a man who was bowing and smiling in a manner more mocking than sincere. It was Horace Wilberson.

The sight of her discarded and disgraced suit—once more at Woodside brought a flush of anger to her face, and her first impulse was to turn and go at once to the house. Second thought, however, convinced her that this would seem to indicate that she was afraid of him, and she instantly assumed a cold, steadfast, haughty air and looked at him with unwavering eyes.

"Good-evening, my dear Claudia," he said, with a most disagreeable air.

"Allow me to ask," the girl frigidly replied, "by what right you are at Woodside?"

"I came to see you."

"Do you know that you are liable to arrest for trespassing?"

"No! Am I, really?"

"You are."

"I think not."

"Do not tempt me too far."

"My dear Claudia, you will not be so cruel as to call an officer. Why won't you? Because, if you do, I shall tell what I know about my dear friend, the professor."

One moment Claudia's gaze wavered. Then she looked him full in the face again.

"What do you know?" she asked.

"Only that he murdered Temple Hathaway!"

Wilberson made the assertion nonchalantly, leaning against a tree and toying lightly with his watch-chain, but under his careless air could be seen a sharp alertness to see how the blow fell. He was disappointed. Claudia felt that it was one of the supreme moments of her life, and that then, if ever, she must act her part well.

"What do you mean by such nonsense?" she asked, with a good show of scorn.

"Just what I say."

"You talk absurdly. Do you expect me to take notice of such conversation?"

"If I had not, I should not be here now. It was to say just this that I came—"

"I did not see you enter the grounds."

"No; I came through the door in the board fence, from the next residence."

"Twice a trespasser."

"Never mind. Let me say why I am here. I love you, Claudia Woodside, proud beauty that you are— Wait! Hear me through. I have asked you to be my wife; you refused. Some men would give up at such a crisis, but that is not my way; I am no milk-and-water dandy. Claudia, you must be my wife; I now ask it in another way. It is in my power to cover you with disgrace through your father. He is a criminal, and—"

"Stop!"

The tone, the imperious gesture which accompanied it, compelled obedience.

"If you are in earnest" said Claudia, "I will answer the same way. Man, you are mad! You speak of the noblest man living, and call him a criminal. Enough! You have shown how mad you are, and I will listen no further. I command you to go away!"

"And I refuse. I will be heard—"

"I will not hear you."

"You must and shall!"

He spoke fiercely, but she retreated a step and made a gesture to keep him back.

"You do not know what you say. I am going to the house now, and if you persist in annoying me I will direct the servants to eject you. If necessary, an officer shall be called."

"Call one, and I will publish your father's crime to all the city. Woman, do you think to cast me off so easily? I am one whose blood flows like fire, and when I love, it is like the simoom's breath. I will not be thwarted. I know enough to bring your father to the gallows—the price of silence is your hand!"

"You play your part well."

"I shall play it well at the altar."

"You will never stand there with me. Once and for all, I know that all you say is false, and I will not hear you."

She was turning away, but he spoke in a voice of such concentrated passion as to stay her.

"Stop! Hear me out. Unless you promise now to become my wife, I will go to a magistrate and make my statement at once. Remember that *murder* is an ugly charge!"

Claudia was very pale, but, as she could not parley with this man—she was already a wife—she resolved to cut the interview short.

"Absurd to the end! Well, so be it. I defy you; do your worst!"

Once more she turned away, but with two long bounds Wilberson reached her side. He threw his hand around her, and then pressed a kiss upon her lips. Her pale face grew crimson with anger and she made an attempt to call for help, but once more she was frustrated. His hand closed over her mouth, preventing any cry. Another moment and the odor of chloroform greeted her nostrils.

A sense of great danger flashed over her, and she struggled to escape, to cry out. In vain! His superior strength baffled her every effort, and she could not avoid breathing the drug.

Her senses wavered—the scene about her grew dim—she lost consciousness.

It was a daring piece of work, and the worst was yet to come. He had drugged her on her own premises, and he had now to get her away—for such was his intention—in the broad light of day.

Half an hour later Professor Woodside came out of his study and inquired for Claudia. She was not to be found in the house, but one of the servants announced that she had seen Miss Woodside and a gentleman in the grounds beyond the house.

The professor went that way, but she was not anywhere on the premises. He was retracing his steps in a troubled mood, and wondering who the "gentleman" could have been, when he came upon a little vial which lay by the path. He picked it up; it was labeled "chloroform!"

This added to his alarm, and when he saw evidence of a struggle in the path, he became greatly agitated. He rushed to a conclusion he would not so quickly have adopted in former days, before trouble came to him, but which was, nevertheless, correct.

Claudia had been abducted!

Instantly his mind turned to Ralph Hathaway. The young man's conduct had been violent, and Woodside was now ready to believe that he had stolen Claudia. He was not in a mood to reason the matter clearly, and the conclusion was purely instinctive.

He was stirred out of his ordinary calm by the thought, and to a fury. No one would have believed him capable of such emotion; but to him Claudia represented about all in the world that was dear. He had been robbed of his child, and his fury knew no bounds.

Quickly he ran to the street, and calling a cab, gave a few directions, sprung in and was soon being whirled away. The journey was not long; in a short time he drew up at a small, neat house.

By some chance the door had temporarily been left ajar, and he pushed it open and entered unceremoniously. Two steps further and he stood face to face with—Margaret Hathaway! Yes; it was the Hathaway cottage; and he stood in the presence of the woman who claimed that he had murdered her husband.

He thought not of that, but one fierce question sprang from his lips.

"Woman, I am Archibald Woodside—where is my daughter?"

But Mrs. Hathaway did not answer. Paler even than usual was her face, and she stared at the visitor as though at a specter. Yes, he was really there—the man who had struck down Temple Hathaway in cold blood. He had dared

come *there*, to the presence of the woman he had widowed. Such hardihood was amazing.

"Why don't you answer?" he cried, irritably. "Your precious son has stolen my child, but I will have her back. If you know aught about the matter, speak out. Where is Claudia?"

Margaret Hathaway's face flushed. Her first surprise rolled away, and her slender figure was drawn to its full height. Standing before him like a tragedy queen, she stretched out one hand and vehemently exclaimed:

"You are a very fit man to turn accuser! I wonder that even *your* unparalleled effrontery was great enough to send you here. Where is Claudia? I know not where your viper offspring is; but let me ask one question in reply: *Where is Temple Hathaway?* Ah! villain and murderer, have you at last come to face the wife of your victim?"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SEEKING TO SAVE CLAUDIA.

EVEN a rock is capable of impression, and, deep as was Professor Woodside's concern for Claudia, he forgot it in that moment. True, he stood in the presence of Temple Hathaway's widow. The full sense of the fact had not before come to him, but he realized it then.

Margaret Hathaway's impassioned words seemed to burn into his brain, and he reeled back, faint and dizzy.

"What! have you nothing to say? You were very ready with words a moment ago!" cried the widow. "Had you forgotten to whom you spoke? At least, you know now; you know, and I ask you—where is Temple Hathaway?"

"Forbear!" gasped the wretched professor.

"Forbear! Did you have mercy upon him?"

"Woman, I never knew—I did not intend—"

"No wonder you stammer! A murderer's tongue may well fail him."

"Mercy!" cried Woodside, putting out one hand.

"Did *you* show mercy?"

"I did not know—"

"Again you stop. Your excuse is not ready; your plea of innocence. You are not so brazen as you thought. Ah! well may your courage fail in the presence of the wife of the man you killed!"

The last words were brokenly spoken. The unnatural mood which had swayed Mrs. Hathaway for a few moments, and turned her usual gentleness to violence, was passing away, and there were signs of an almost hysterical collapse on her part. Woodside, however, had been making great efforts to rally, and not without a degree of success. He was almost as pale as Mrs. Hathaway, but his manner gradually grew calmer and more dignified.

"You do not know what you say, madam. I never harmed your husband."

"Of course you deny it."

"More," he went on, "I never even saw him; I never had any connection with him in any way, shape or form."

"Do you expect me to believe this?"

"I should be glad to have you."

"No doubt! No doubt you would be glad to blind me; to make yourself safe. But you talk in vain; I have my husband's dying words as my guide, and his blood cries aloud from the grave for vengeance. Oh! villain that you were, to rob me of all I had!"

She sunk into a chair and burst into violent sobs, but at that moment steps sounded on the floor above and Ralph came hurriedly down the stairs. He paused in amazement at the scene before him, scarcely able to believe the evidence of his own eyes.

His mother and Professor Woodside together! What did it mean?

The professor's voice broke the silence.

"Mr. Hathaway, I have come here to see you. Do you know where Claudia is?"

There was nothing harsh in his manner. The last scene had crushed all inclination that way, and when he saw Ralph, he instinctively felt that his was not the face of a woman-stealer.

"Claudia!" Ralph echoed. "No, I have not seen her. Why do you ask? I hope nothing is wrong."

"Something is wrong."

"What? Speak quickly!"

"Claudia has disappeared."

"Disappeared!"

The young man echoed the word nervously, and clutched at the bannisters as though for support. Then he suddenly rallied and came down the remaining steps quickly. His expression was a mixture of alarm and resolution which spoke well for him.

"What has happened?" he demanded. "Speak out at once. Why should Claudia disappear?"

"I have reason to believe she has been abducted, and in the first rush of my emotions, I confess, I suspected you. I was probably wrong. You shall hear the story."

And then the professor told what he had seen and heard at Woodside. Ralph knit his brows in a thoughtful frown. He recognized the absence of convincing evidence, but his own fears had been aroused, and he was inclined to take the professor's view of the case.

"Who could have molested her?" he asked.

"Suspicion may well point to one man—Horace Wilberson. This person is a rejected suitor, and he has been refused admission to Woodside House. It would be just in keeping with his nature to do such a deed."

"I can well believe you, and it is to Wilberson we must look. As for me, I need hardly say that I am wholly innocent. I would sooner cut off my right hand than wrong Claudia in any way."

"I believe you, Mr. Hathaway."

"Now, to action!" added Ralph, in a ringing voice. "We must start while the trail is warm, and run this scoundrel to earth. Have you any idea where to look for him?"

"Unfortunately, I have not."

"In my opinion we had better consult a good detective at once, and I know just the man for the work. His name is Duke Dorgan."

"I know him, too," said Woodside, after a pause.

Ralph hesitated. He remembered that he had employed Dorgan to clear up the mystery of his father's death, and had directed his suspicions of Professor Woodside. Who knew what progress had been made?

"Has he—a—called upon you?" the young man asked, with equal hesitation.

"Casually, in connection with business with my son."

Ralph glanced at his mother. She had wept herself quiet, almost forgotten by him, and was now looking at him calmly. She understood the glance.

"Go, my son, but first give me a word in private with you. Come with me!"

She retreated to the parlor and Ralph followed.

"My boy, you are going out with the man who killed your father—"

He made an impatient gesture, but she went on in a steady voice:

"And I bid you be very careful. All this may be a trap to decoy you to some lonely place and make way with you as your father was made way with. I do not think that this is the case, but, for my sake, be careful."

The warning grated on Ralph's nerves then, for his thoughts were all of Claudia, but he knew how devotedly his mother loved him. He kissed her tenderly.

"I will do all you ask, but you need have no fear. I feel sure this is just as Woodside says, and my duty to my wife is plain. Rest assured, though, I will be careful."

He then rejoined the professor and they went outside. The cab was waiting, and, struck with a sudden thought, the professor addressed the driver:

"I found you waiting near my house. Pray, did you see any one leave there shortly before I appeared—in a cab, for instance?"

"No; but two men brought a sick lady out of the next house, an' carried her off in a cab. It was the house east o' yours."

Woodside saw the point at once. It was the deserted house, and, by making use of the grounds, the abductors had borne Claudia away successfully. The cabman admitted that he had not seen the "sick lady" until they had conveyed her to the gate, and could not say that she had been brought from the house. One of the men who helped carry her, he added, was the driver of the other vehicle.

Being asked to describe the lady and the second man, he did so in such a way that both his hearers felt positive that Claudia's abductor was Horace Wilberson.

"But the other cabman," said Ralph. "Did you know him?"

"I did, that. His name was Mose Acker, an' he's what may be called a raw-beef rough."

"Where would we be likely to find him?"

"The Lord knows; I don't. I've seen him on the street often, but who he is, or who he drives for, I don't know."

"We can learn," interrupted Woodside, as he entered the cab. "It will be easy enough to do all but find the man, himself, and the police can do that. I feel a good deal encouraged. Unless they spirit Claudia away with great rapidity our chances are good for soon running Wilberson down."

By this time they were rolling toward Dorgan's house, and this place they reached in due time. Disappointment awaited them, however.

Dorgan was not in, nor could the people of the house give any clue to his whereabouts.

Ralph and the professor looked at each other in troubled inquiry. What course were they to take now? They were in the work together as earnestly as though no cloud had ever come between them. Animated by one common motive, they forgot that event of the past which should, in their opinion, make them shrink from each other.

"Their ruling passion was to save Claudia."

"What is the next step?" Woodside asked.

"I don't know. We must notify the police, and have a general alarm sent out, but we—what are we to do?"

"We must do something, but our first duty is to notify the police, as you say. After that—well, I, at least, cannot remain idle while Claudia is in peril. Drive like the wind, man!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

JUST IN TIME!

STRAIGHT to the nearest police-station went Woodside and Ralph, and their story was soon told.

"I know Mose Acker," said the captain. "This ain't the first crooked work he has been engaged in, and I hope we shall get him in quod, this time. Send out an alarm, sergeant, and let every patrolman be on the alert. Acker lives down near the ferry, but I don't think they would take her there."

"He might," Woodside urged.

"No. Mose would know that we would soon run him down. He has a sister who lives somewhere in Hoboken. He might give Wilberson a chance there, but I should say that the latter would have some den of his own, in which to hide her."

"Have you any theory?"

"Not at present, and I see no way but to take a little time. Some patrolman may notice Mose on his way and, when it is known that the fellow is wanted, give us news which will show which way they went."

"But, in the mean while, they have a chance to get Miss Woodside far away," said Ralph.

"That is true, but what better can we do? The alarm sent out will put every officer on the alert, and will, perhaps, result in speedy victory for us, but to run about hap-hazard does not seem very promising."

They recognized the force of this argument. Wilberson had already had time enough to either secrete Claudia in some house, or drive miles away. Still, a period of inactivity would be very painful at such a crisis. The police captain was anxious to help them—the more so because Woodside was a well-known citizen—and he would undoubtedly do his best.

They left the station, consulted, and then drove again to Dorgan's. This visit resulted the same as the first. The detective had not returned. This was extremely vexatious, for both had a conviction that he could keep them more than any one else.

By the professor's invitation Ralph rode to Woodside House with him. It was clear to the younger man on the journey that the professor's best way was to stay in the house when once there. He lay back in the cab like one utterly exhausted, and his hands trembled greatly.

As they drew up at the gate they met Philip coming out. He looked excited, and at once exclaimed:

"Claudia is gone!"

"I know it," his father wearily answered.

"I believe she has been abducted. I was up in Hoboken a little while ago, and, as I was passing an old house there, I saw a face at a window which seemed like hers. It rather startled me for a moment, but I told myself it was absurd and went on. Now that I know she is gone I feel sure I *did* see her."

"Can you find that house again?" Ralph eagerly asked, remembering the captain's statement that Mose Acker had a sister who lived in Hoboken.

"I feel sure that I can."

"Then let us go there at once."

"Yes," the professor aded, "we will get a fresh team and go immediately."

Ralph looked at him critically.

"Mr. Woodside," he said, gravely, "you are not in condition to go; you are utterly tired out. Why not go to the house, and leave this matter to Philip and me? I assure you we will do all that men can."

The professor demurred, but Philip added his voice, and the old man was forced to admit that he felt as badly as he looked. He might grow worse and be a drag on them—yes; it was better that he should not go with them.

The two young men were soon in motion. Another cab was engaged, and they started for Hoboken. Ralph felt relieved at the change of companions. Philip, like Claudia, was innocent of all complicity in that old affair, however it might be with the elder Woodside. Philip was satisfied with his companion. Having been away from home so much, and so little given to observing, he had no suspicion of the startling scenes in which Ralph had figured.

He saw in him only a hardy young man, and that was what was needed then. Philip was all energy. Here was some excitement to quicken his blood, and he loved his sister—nobody could be more energetic than he would be for a time.

The driver had been directed to go as fast as he dared drive, and he obeyed so well that several patrolmen looked scowlingly at the cab, and seemed more than half-inclined to stop it.

As they neared the desired locality Philip began to use his eyes sharply. He knew the whole place in a general way, but had never noticed the house in particular, and he now had to identify it.

He suddenly gave a start and extended one hand.

"There it is!" he exclaimed.

It was an old house standing somewhat back from the street. Probably it had once possessed some pretensions to style, but time had swept all this away. House and yard were alike in a

demoralized condition, and it seemed a fit place for plotters to herd.

The cab drew up before the gate and the young men alighted.

"I wish Deep Duke was here now, Philip," said Ralph.

"So do I, but we wish in vain. Come on!" Philip strode impetuously into the yard and they went to the door. An old-fashioned knocker was attached thereto, and Philip gave it an imperious rattling.

Twice was the summons repeated before any signs of life could be seen, but the door was finally opened. A masculine-looking old woman stood before them.

"Well, what d'ye want?" she curtly asked.

Philip pushed into the hall, and was followed by Ralph.

"We want to see the young lady," the former replied.

"You do, eh? Take this for a princess's house, do ye? Well, you'll have to look further. Thar ain't no young lady here; I don't have such cattle in my house."

"Nonsense! I know better. We have come on purpose to see her, and the sooner you produce her the better it will be for you. We are not in mood for fooling."

"What d'ye s'pose I care what sort o' a mood you're in?" the old woman retorted. "The long an' short on't is, you ain't wanted here, an' ef you don't git out, I'll call a cop an' have you put out."

"One word, woman," said Ralph, sternly. "We know what we're talking about, and are not to be bluffed. You have a young lady here as a prisoner, brought only a short time ago. We have come for her, and are going to have her. If you do not submit quietly, we will call an officer."

"You think you're very brave ter come here an' bully a woman, don't ye? And all fur nothing. Well, if you're so red-hot, why, you can look the house over all you hanker to, but when you're done, ef you don't git out, it will be the worse fur you. I don't care a rap fur yer good clothes an' fine ways. Come on, my precious babies!"

She dropped them a mocking courtesy, closed the door and again faced them grimly.

"Which way first, children?" she added.

Unmoved by this marvelous wit, Ralph suggested that the cellar and first floor receive attention at once, and that Philip should guard the outer door while he went with the old woman.

This was done, but neither place revealed a prisoner.

Only the second floor remained, and as it was there that Ralph expected to find Claudia, if at all, he did not object to Philip's company.

A guard might be stationed over the captive, who would make a desperate resistance.

They went above, and the old woman led them to room after room, of which there was a goodly number. But not a human being did any contain. Philip's face was growing downcast, but Ralph believed they were on the track. There was something in the woman's manner which indicated that she was triumphing over them and exulting over the fact.

But they finally came to a halt after emerging from what the woman pronounced the last room.

"Well, are you satisfied, dearies?" she scoffed.

"No!" Ralph sternly answered.

"No?"

"That's what I said."

"What more can I do for my little boys?"

"You can stop your clatter!" exclaimed Philip in great disgust.

"And more than that," Ralph added. "Woman, I claim to have mathematical and architectural eyes, and if I am not confoundedly mistaken, there is one more room!"

He was looking her directly in the face as he spoke, and he believed that a shade of annoyance and fear flashed over her face.

"There are ten rooms on this floor, countin' the L, an' you've been in 'em all," she replied.

"We have been in all the open rooms, but I have detected that there is an amount of space on this side for which I cannot account. Have you a secret room there?"

Despite her brazen character, the old woman could not carry out her role of careless mockery. She looked worried, and her voice was shaky as she tried to be as indifferent and scornful as ever.

"Bless its dear heart! what new crotchet has it got?"

"I'll show you."

At one side of the hall stood a wardrobe which had a very innocent look, but Ralph strode to and laid hold of it, as though to move it aside.

"Let that alone!" cried the old woman, springing forward to stop him, but Philip caught and held her.

At the same moment Ralph moved the wardrobe, and a door was revealed behind it. He tried the latch, and, finding it locked, was about to call for the key, when he saw that very article lying on the floor, as though it had been thrown under the wardrobe.

He quickly fitted it to the lock, turned back

the bolt, and swung open the door. A room was revealed beyond, but before he had time to survey it, a revolver was thrust into his face and a big man loomed up before him.

"Hands up, or—"

He did not finish the sentence. Ralph was all on the alert, and with a quick motion he sent out his clinched hand, and the man went over headlong. Ralph had struck a blow which would have delighted a professional.

Another moment, and he had bounded into the room, followed by Philip. And this is what they saw:

Claudia was there, and a big ruffian was holding a knife before her bosom, while a third man had a club in his hands which looked formidable enough to be fit for a giant's use. He who held the knife uttered an oath and flung the captive girl aside.

"The jig is up!" he exclaimed. "Boys, rally to it. These infernal spies must never leave here alive. Mother Bet, do your duty!"

The door closed with a clang, and Ralph and Philip were shut in with the gang, the old woman being braced against the door, and looking as formidable as a man.

"Clean 'em out," added the previous speaker.

"Kill every bloody spy you can get hold of!"

Ralph and Philip had drawn their revolvers, but the odds were against them. Another moment, and the whole party would have been joined in an affray, but, suddenly, there was a new diversion. Mother Bet went flying into the middle of the room as though shot from a cannon, and then, in her place, a man stood by the open door, a cocked revolver in each hand.

"Hold on, all!" he cried. "The first man who stirs, dies by my hand!"

"Duke Dorgan!" cried Claudia, joyfully.

"Yes, it's I," coolly replied the detective, "and just in time, I reckon. Jim Trask, put up your weapon—we won't have any fighting here. You know my way—put it up, I say!"

The change which had come over the roughs was wonderful. They all knew the detective, and they *did* know his "way." They wilted at the sight, as though Dorgan had had an army at his back, and began looking about as though to find some crevice through which they could escape.

Claudia had hastened to the side of her protectors, and the case seemed settled, but Duke did not lower his revolvers. He knew those men—at the least chance they would be in the ring again, ready to fight and murder.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE PROFESSOR'S PERIL.

DORGAN coolly addressed the roughs again.

"We will now break up this seance, gents. I don't believe you will object to our taking the girl away, and, in return, we'll do something for you. You can go free."

"Surely, Dorgan, you will not allow this!" cried Ralph.

"Why not?"

"These scoundrels deserve punishment."

"Don't worry. I can find them any time I want them, can't I, Jim Trask?"

"See here," said that person, quickly, "I'll make a clean breast of it. We were jailers of the girl, and nothing more. She was taken in to oblige Mose Acker, but one Horace Wilberson was at the back of it all."

"Where is Wilberson now?"

"Gone back to Jersey City."

"That's all straight. Well, we won't trouble you now; we'll go out and leave you alone."

Duke looked significantly at Ralph and, convinced that he had some good reason for his course, the latter objected no more. They took Claudia from the house, after receiving her assurance that, except for her brief captivity, she had been used fairly well, and as Philip walked with her to the street Ralph took occasion to speak to the detective.

"How did you happen to appear on the scene?"

"It was a mere accident. I was passing the house when a cabman called me by name, and said there were two men in the house who, just as they went in, observed that they 'wished Deep Duke was there.' His description gave me the idea, and I came in. So Wilberson became desperate and stole Miss Woodside, eh? I'll put the screws upon that knave very soon. By the way, business will keep me here for an hour or two; take Claudia home, and I will see you this evening. I have news for you."

"News?"

"Yes; and news that will show you that justice, though tardy, is sure. Your father shall be avenged, Mr. Hathaway. Say no more now."

They had reached the street, and the detective proceeded to get rid of his companions in the shortest time possible. His manner impressed Claudia as peculiar, but his words had created even a greater impression in Ralph's mind.

As the cab rolled away Claudia and Philip looked, acted and talked happily, and Ralph felt that he ought to appear the same, but his heart seemed to lie like lead in his bosom. The detective's last words had been like a blow to him. They indicated a speedy retribution for Professor Woodside, but the mere idea of it now filled Ralph with alarm.

Their association during the day had seemed to make the professor less terrible to him, and he caught himself wishing for the moment that Dorgan might utterly fail to prove his case.

The return to Woodside House was made without further adventure, and she had never been more glad to see its friendly walls. She was anxious, too, to meet her father and comfort him.

Ralph left them at the gate, promising to call soon, and then brother and sister entered the house. Claudia did not wait to remove her outer garments, but hurried at once to the professor's study and, omitting the usual formality of a knock, opened the door and entered, wishing to give him a pleasant surprise.

It was a surprise all around when she entered, and as much so for her as any one else.

The first person she saw, lounging carelessly in an easy-chair, was—Horace Wilberson!

She came to a halt, amazed at the brazen effrontery of the man in venturing there after what he had done, while he looked dumfounded at her reappearance. But the lull was broken by a cry of joy, and Professor Woodside sprang forward and clasped her in his arms.

"My child!" exclaimed the old man, "thank Heaven that I see you again!"

Tears were falling from his eyes, but Claudia did not think of weeping. She returned the caress, kissed him and then turned to Wilberson with flashing eyes.

"You wretch!" she exclaimed, "how dare you come here—how dare you?"

Wilberson was not ready with his reply, for her return had been a severe blow to him, but he made a great effort to recover his old impudent air and managed to force a laugh.

"There's no 'dare' about it," he replied. "Takes no great courage to come to a house where I am master."

"It is false! You are not master here, and you shall learn that it is as I say. You did not dream when you came here that I would appear on the scene, but I have escaped from your trap and your race is run."

"Yes," added the voice of Philip, husky with anger, "and I will call an officer and have you arrested."

"Call one," said Wilberson, in a steel-like voice, "and I will have Archibald Woodside arrested for murder! Do you hear? For murder!"

"Monster!" murmured the professor, as he dropped into a chair.

"I know too much to be kicked away by you," went on the schemer, confidently. "I know who killed Temple Hathaway, and I will tell the whole world unless you compromise with me. The price of my silence is—Claudia's hand in marriage. Take your choice, my dear professor; give me your daughter at the altar, or go you to the gallows. Which shall it be?"

Smiling easily, insolently, yet speaking with an inexorable ring in his voice, Wilberson surveyed the trio before him. He felt sure of triumph, and enjoyed the situation as only a low mind can another's suffering.

"Father," said Philip, impetuously, "say the word and this wretch shall stay here no longer!"

"He dares not," Wilberson calmly replied.

"By my life, I dare!" almost shouted the young man, and he made a step forward.

But the professor put out a hand imploringly.

"No, no; do nothing hasty. Let me think!" "That is right; think of the years you were in Europe. In Europe! Ha! ha! that was a fine joke. A jolly time you had in Europe, professor."

"Horace Wilberson," interrupted Claudia, in a husky voice, "whatever happens, you shall be punished for kidnapping me."

"Not so. You dare not press that charge. You would drag your father down. No; on the contrary, you will take me to be your husband, and make a good, dutiful wife."

Claudia turned away with a gesture of loathing. Words would fail to tell how she had learned to hate that man. He seemed the personification of a fiend, and all the more so because he had some mysterious hold upon her father.

She looked at the professor then, and it almost broke her heart. He was cowering in a chair, his face covered with his hands, and his attitude was that of one who has bidden farewell to hope.

Claudia shivered. Was this dreadful charge true?

Wilberson had insinuated that the professor was Temple Hathaway's murderer, and she remembered the letters she had taken from the old cabinet and burned. If her father was innocent, why did he not deny this charge, and defy the mocking villain whose very presence was an insult?

Whatever was true, Claudia was not in a position to comply with Wilberson's demand. She was Ralph Hathaway's wife. She wondered what effect this knowledge would have on her enemy, and determined to ask her father's advice.

She turned again to Wilberson.

"I wish you and Philip to go to the parlor a

moment. I want to speak alone with my father."

"What trick does this cover?" he suspiciously asked.

"None."

"Do you intend to lock me out? If so—"

"I intend nothing of the kind. I promise that if you will go out for ten minutes you shall then be readmitted."

Wilberson believed that he saw in this symptoms of yielding, and he arose.

"It shall be as you say," he replied.

And then he walked out, followed by Philip. That young man was resolved to keep sight of him at all hazards, hoping for a chance to bring him to justice. When they were gone, Claudia went to the professor's side and lifted his gray head.

"Father, can you listen to me?"

"Speak on!" was the hoarse reply.

"Where were you during the years of your trip to Europe?"

"Heaven help me," groaned the unhappy man, "I do not know!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

STARTLING EXPLANATIONS.

THE professor's strange reply surprised Claudia.

"You do not know where you were?" she repeated.

"No."

"But if you went to Europe—"

"I do not know that I went there."

"You don't know. I don't understand."

"I can make it all too plain, and yet even more perplexing. I do not know where I was during that time, because all those years of my life are a blank."

"Why, surely—"

"I am more perplexed than any one else, but I have no reason to suppose I was ever in Europe. In plain words I lost my mind—became crazy, or whatever you see fit to call it—and left my home. Where I went, or how I spent those years, I know no more than you."

"And," gasped the bewildered girl, "it was during this time that Temple Hathaway was slain."

She was sorry for the words the moment they were uttered. Woodside shivered like a leaf in the wind.

"Yes," he said, in a husky whisper.

Claudia looked at him in dumb surprise. Now, indeed, she saw that a great calamity menaced them. Her father might be innocent of intentional wrong-doing, yet he might have killed Temple Hathaway. What had those old letters indicated? The stricken girl felt weak and dizzy—how, now, were they to save themselves from Wilberson?

Suddenly an idea flashed upon her.

"Father, let us give the case to Duke Dorgan, the detective, and let him learn all."

"That is just what I am afraid of."

"Do you mean that you are afraid—"

"That I killed Temple Hathaway? Yes. Do not start, Claudia; before Heaven, I have no knowledge that I did, and if so, I was as innocent of intentional crime as you, my child."

"Then let your mental state at that time be proven—"

"Impossible! Twenty years have passed, and I am sure no one then suspected that I was deranged."

"And," said Claudia, huskily, "what are we to say to that wretch who asks me to marry him?"

"Refuse him now, as you did before!" and the old man's head was suddenly lifted, while his voice rang out with surprising clearness. "Whatever happens to me, you shall not be sacrificed, my child."

"Father, how would it be if I were already married?"

"I wish you were, and to Ralph Hathaway."

"Then your wish is gratified. Father, do not blame me; but some days ago—before I knew you were in any trouble—I was secretly married to Ralph. I am irrevocably his wife!"

Woodside's face flushed, and he quickly arose.

"Call in Wilberson!" he said, in a ringing voice. "Call him in and let him hear this—then, if he does not go quietly, the servants shall throw him out."

His sudden change of manner overjoyed Claudia. Whatever the result might be it was happiness to her to see her father once more himself, and she moved impulsively to the door and called Philip's name. He came in, with Wilberson in front of him, watching sharply to see that their enemy did not run away.

"Man," said the professor, in the same clear voice, "our answer is ready. Miss Woodside could not marry you if she would, for she is already married. We have kept this secret, but she is Ralph Hathaway's wife!"

"It is false!" sharply cried the schemer. "I will not believe you. It is a trick—"

"If you do not believe it, I will show my marriage-certificate," interrupted Claudia.

Her dignified voice and manner carried conviction suddenly to Wilberson's mind. His eyes assumed a wild look and his face became sallow; then the latter suddenly grew red with anger.

"By the fiends!" he cried, "if I cannot have a wife, I will have revenge!"

"Revenge on whom?" Woodside coldly asked. "On you, and on her. I will send you to the gallows, and— Hold! there is still another way. Ha! ha!"

He broke off with a harsh, unnatural laugh.

"Now, here is a chance to fill my empty purse. Professor Woodside, you murdered Temple Hathaway. I will tell this to the whole world, unless you give me ten thousand dollars to keep silent!"

"I will not give you a penny."

"Fool! I can prove all I allege; I can prove that you killed Temple Hathaway. If you are reckless in regard to your own life, surely you would not disgrace your children. It would not make Claudia happy to have her father die the death of a—"

"Enough! We have listened too long already. Leave this house, or the servants shall eject you."

"I will not go without the ten thousand."

"You shall not have a penny!"

"Then, by the demons! you shall die on the gallows!"

"Not at your bidding, Horace Wilberson!"

It was a new, clear and ringing voice at the door, and the quartette turned as one person. Another man had invaded the room, and he stood looking at Wilberson with a stern expression on his manly face.

"Duke Dorgan!" cried Claudia, joyfully.

"Yes, it is I," the detective answered, "and I judge that I have come just in time. You, Horace Wilberson, what are you doing here?"

All of Wilberson's effrontery did not serve to make him face this danger boldly. He was terribly afraid of Duke Dorgan, and would rather have seen any other living man at that moment. He shrunk back, and, though he tried to speak, not a word passed his trembling lips.

"You seem determined to rush on to your own destruction," the detective sternly added.

"Oh! I dare say you are a friend to this gang of vipers," suddenly, and somewhat vaguely, cried the cornered schemer, "but I am not down yet. Tread on me if you wish; you will find a sting under all. Woodside, advise this man-hunter to let me go free. 'Twill be better for you!"

The professor was pale, but he now faced the danger with unwavering resolution.

"I decline!" he steadily replied.

"Claudia, have you no mercy on your old father?"

It was Wilberson's last hope, but Dorgan did not give the girl a chance to speak.

"Miss Woodside, do not degrade yourself by replying to this creature," the detective quickly said. "I would gladly advise you to throw him out of the house, but the law wants him."

"I will not go alone," gasped Wilberson.

"You don't know what you are talking about. Let me show you one of my friends."

He raised his voice a trifle and called a name, and Ralph Hathaway entered the room. His face was radiant with happiness, and he went to Claudia, clasped her in his arms and kissed her tenderly.

"How now, Wilberson?" continued Dorgan. "Here is Temple Hathaway's son. Ask him what he thinks of Professor Woodside's connection with his father's death."

Ralph advanced to the professor's side.

"Mr. Woodside," he said, in a frank, manly way, "I owe you an apology. I have wronged you by unjust suspicions, for which I am now truly sorry. Will you take my hand?"

"Do so unhesitatingly, professor," Dorgan added. "I will prove that you need not be ashamed to take the hand of any man."

Wilberson trembled with anger as he saw the two clasp hands, and then he muttered:

"This does not change the facts of the case."

"The facts!" Dorgan retorted. "Precious little you know about them. You have asked where Professor Woodside was during the years he was once supposed to be in Europe."

"He did not go there."

"You think so; I know he did not; but he was in an honest, though unfortunate, place. It is not for you to know where he was; it is none of your business. Woods!"

He raised his voice and called the last name, and then a stern-faced, official-looking man entered.

"Woods, this is my prisoner," continued the detective, indicating Wilberson. "Take care of him while I speak to these people aside."

"I will not submit!" said Wilberson, savagely. "I am not to be bullied—"

Duke made a motion to Woods, and that person produced handcuffs. Both moved upon Wilberson; there was a brief struggle, and the handcuffs were on his wrists.

"So much for you, my man," added the detective. "You would have it; now I hope you are content."

He stepped to the other side of the room, followed by the professor, Claudia, Philip and Ralph. Then he gravely addressed the professor:

"Mr. Woodside, I have reason to believe that several years of your life, some twenty years ago, are a blank to you. Am I right?"

"You are," was the nervous reply.

"Then I will tell you how they were spent."

If you will allow me to mix a little theorizing with the facts, I will venture the opinion that close attention to your scientific work so overtaxed your mind that your reason became clouded—certain it is that the last part is true.

"Probably you knew your condition, but concealed it with the cunning often shown by those similarly afflicted. You announced that you were going to Europe, and suddenly disappeared."

"Where did I go?" huskily asked Woodside.

"To Pennsylvania, and put yourself under the care of one skilled in complaints like yours, and there it was that you remained all those years. In plain words, the asylum that you sought was a private home for the insane."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

WHO KILLED TEMPLE HATHAWAY.

WOODSIDE'S face suddenly grew bright.

"And was I there all through those years? Was I there when Temple Hathaway was—was—"

"You were in the asylum when Temple Hathaway was slain; you never left the asylum during those years which are a blank to you. When you applied for admission you gave a false name and address, as the head physician soon learned, but his rules were not as rigid as those of a State institution; you gave him a generous sum of money and he was content.

"There you remained a long time. You were never violent, and, showing no scientific inclination, you were always eager to work on the land connected with the place. In this way you improved your health physically, and grew as rugged as a laborer, and he saw that you would ultimately recover your reason.

"One day you disappeared. You had secretly left the institution, and he never saw you again until two years ago. Then he met you on the streets of Jersey City. He inquired of others and learned who you were, but, with unusual delicacy, or it may have been a peculiarity of his nature, he never addressed you. He had been well paid and was satisfied.

"He now lives in Hoboken, having retired from business five years ago. I was on my way to see him when I chanced to aid in rescuing Miss Woodside to-day, and that is why I was in such haste.

"I learned about this doctor from an old man named, or rather, nicknamed, Daddy Posey. He was once an attendant in the asylum, from which he was discharged for dishonesty. He knew where the doctor lived, and directed me. Perhaps you wonder *why* he directed me. Well, his term at the asylum covered Mr. Woodside's stay there, and he remembered him well. *Why* he remembered him I will soon state, as it was an odd fact."

The detective ceased speaking, and the professor took up the conversation eagerly:

"I see it all now. I recovered my reason suddenly, when near my own home, and it is clear that it happened soon after my escape from the asylum. Whether I had any presentiment of what was about to occur can, I suppose, never be learned. It is a strange affair, anyway."

"Everything connected with those deranged is peculiar," Dorgan answered, "and their cunning is often wonderful."

"But," said Woodside, hesitatingly, "what of—of Temple Hathaway?"

"I will now tell you. Let us return to the others."

Duke went into the hall, was absent a few moments, and then returned, accompanied by two other men. One was plainly an officer, and he led the second, who was handcuffed.

At sight of this man Claudia, Philip and Wilberson looked in wonder. He was a stout, coarse-looking person, evidently of the lower ranks in life, but, except for these differences, *he was wonderfully like Professor Woodside* in every way—eyes, forehead, nose and general contour of the face.

"Miss Woodside and gentlemen," said Deep Duke, quietly, "allow me to introduce Zachary Rose, gambler, thief, counterfeiter, convict and—assassin of Temple Hathaway!"

"It's a lie!" broke out the accused, fiercely.

"I never saw or heard of Temple Hathaway."

"Easy, Zachary, easy!" warned the detective, serenely. "You can deny all you see fit when in court, but you will not harm your cause by keeping silent here. Now, Horace Wilberson, what have you to say?"

Wilberson had nothing to say. He stared blankly at the other prisoner, and felt that all hope was gone. This man was enough like Woodside to be his twin brother.

"I now have an explanation to make," continued Dorgan. "This man I never saw until to-day, and our meeting was somewhat exciting. I was in a tumble-down old house in the lower part of the city, talking with a man of whom I shall have more to say later, when I heard sounds which convinced me that a spy was at the door.

"I suddenly sprang in that direction, tore open the door, and confronted this person just as he was taking aim at me with a revolver. I made a prisoner of him, and saw at a glance that it was an important capture. His remarkable

resemblance to Professor Woodside gave me an idea.

"For some time I have been trying to solve the mystery of Temple Hathaway's death, and twice since I have been on the case, my life has been attempted. In each case I made a prisoner, but these men refused to talk, and I could not learn why I had been attacked nor who set them on. I felt that there was an *unseen power* in the game, and that I was dangerous to some one, whom I did not know. Who was it? I have now learned, and you shall hear the story, as I have learned it from this man's father, a person commonly called 'Daddy Posey.'"

The prisoner grated his teeth and glared at the detective, but said nothing. Wholly unmoved, Deep Duke continued:

"Twenty-five years ago there lived in Jersey City one Jacob Rose and his son, Zachary. The former went to work in an insane asylum in Pennsylvania, remained there some years, returned, grew old, became a mere vagabond and finally became known by the nickname of 'Daddy Posey.' It arose from his real name, I suppose, but men gradually forgot that he was named Rose.

"It is of his son, Zachary, I wish to speak principally. One day this person was on the street with a friend, when they met a third man, and this man was so like Zachary that his friend commented upon it. They learned that he was Professor Archibald Woodside. This was twenty-five years ago, and the professor was not as well known then as now.

"The resemblance made an impression on Zachary Rose, and he assumed the name of Archibald Woodside at times. I believe he had no real object; it was a mere freak. Zachary was lazy and unscrupulous, and his great ambition was to get rich at a bound.

"About this time he married a poor girl. This was not a good way to get rich, so, I dare say, he must have cared for her in his way. Her name was Agnes Benson, and she was a member of the church presided over by the Reverend Mr. Oates. Rose then used this fact to help him along. He managed to get a recommendation from Mr. Oates, and, on the strength of it, secured a position with Bergnam, a dealer in South American goods.

"Now comes the darkest chapter in his career. He was not content with his position, but wild schemes for getting rich suddenly filled his head. He went to a firm on Leonard street, and laid one of his schemes before them. It was considered for some time, but, in the end, was rejected because one of the partners pronounced it dishonest.

"This partner was Temple Hathaway. Rose or, as he called himself, Archibald Woodside, was very angry. Late one night he went to the store when all the partners and employees were gone except Hathaway, and made a last, great effort to change Hathaway's resolution, and get his scheme adopted.

"Once more he failed, and, in his mad anger, he struck Temple Hathaway down, inflicting a wound from which he died before four hours had elapsed!"

"I deny it!" asseverated Zachary Rose, hotly.

"It is utterly false—I deny it all!"

"You will have the worst, won't you?" said Dorgan, severely. "So be it. Unfortunately for you, you have told all this to your father, and I have his sworn statement."

Rose's face grew pale, and he made no reply.

"When this deed was done Rose fled to Bangor, Maine, where he became a lumberman, and at times, a log-driver on the rivers. There, too, he met and married a woman named Eunice Eastman. As he committed bigamy by so doing, he used the name of Archibald Woodside during the ceremony—though known in Bangor as Zachary Rose—and his new bride, the most shy, nervous and inexperienced of women, did not notice the cheat clearly, though it afterward occurred to her.

"Rose took charge of the certificate and concealed it in the basement of an old church, where I found it during a late visit to Bangor. In his day the old church was the rendezvous of a gang of counterfeiters, with whom he was connected, but the police finally dropped on the gang and Rose fled to escape arrest.

"At Newburyport, Massachusetts, he stole a horse to aid his flight, but was captured and given a term in the State Prison, at Charlestown. During his term there he was known as Archibald Woodside, the name he gave when arrested.

"The day after his release some men called there and stated that they wanted him for a murder committed in New York. They failed to get him, and these men I have not yet placed. I suspect that they were 'shady' detectives, who gave it up when they found him gone.

"By the way, a certain small picture has played a part in this case. It was one of Professor Woodside, taken twenty-five years ago. It fell into the hands of the elder Rose, *alias* Daddy Posey, at a time which will be understood by some here, and was by him sent to Zachary, to let the latter see how much he and the original were alike. Zachary had this picture when in Bangor, and he gave it to the Mrs. Rose of that day, as his own.

"A short time ago Mrs. Rose came to New York, looking for her husband, and engaged me to find him. She gave me the picture, but I was assaulted by a so-called private detective named Peters, and he stole one-half of the picture. Lately, I arrested him for misdemeanors and recovered the picture.

"There are some here who have believed Professor Woodside guilty of Zachary Rose's misdeeds, and, at one time, I so believed. The picture given me by Mrs. Rose was very like yonder painting on the wall, and Woodside expressed an aversion to deserted wives. The latter fact I now account for as a mere hobby on his part.

"One word more in regard to Zachary Rose and I am done. Of late he has been living a crooked, yet shady, life in Jersey City, and, as he soon learned that I was investigating Temple Hathaway's case, he became alarmed and set several of his tools upon me, notably a man named Brown. Another of his gang was nearly drowned in the North River, by mistake, but saved his carcass at the last moment.

"Now, all is made plain, and, you see, there is no reason why the houses of Woodside and Hathaway should not be friends."

Ralph went straight to the professor's side.

"Mr. Woodside, I have made some grievous mistakes in this matter. Will you forgive me?"

"Gladly, my dear boy, gladly. You redeemed yourself by rescuing Claudia, and I could not blame you, anyway. Claudia, this way!"

With tearful eyes, but a happy face, the old gentleman joined the hands of the young people.

"All is now settled," he said. "I need say no more."

"And it is certainly enough for us all," Ralph gratefully replied, while on Claudia's face was the light of a happiness too great to be expressed in words.

Wilberson was utterly crushed, and Zachary Rose glared at them all savagely.

"To you," added the professor, addressing Duke Dorgan, in a trembling voice, "we owe a debt of gratitude such as few people ever know. I hope to reward you more fully, but, for now, let me say that you have raised me to the height of happiness. May Heaven bless you!"

The drama is past, and light and shadow have fallen where they were deserved. Zachary Rose suffered the extreme penalty of the law, and none regretted his death. Wilberson and Peters went to prison for appropriate terms, and Deep Duke did not forget Brown and the other minor rascals.

He gathered them in, and gave them their deserts.

A confession by Peters explained all about the letters found by Claudia in the old cabinet. They were forgeries. Peters was bound to win his game, and, having obtained a specimen of Temple Hathaway's writing, he secured some ancient writing-paper and Wilberson forged the letters.

Next, Peters burglariously entered the house, and managed to place them in the old cabinet unseen. It will be remembered that Claudia found them just before Peters's open visit, when he tried to arrest Woodside, but was driven off by Duke. If he had arrested Woodside, and then "discovered" the letters in the cabinet, his case would seem to have been complete.

But, as in many other things, he was foiled by his tireless foe, the sleuth detective.

The men who had tried in vain to arrest Rose at the Charlestown prison were found by Dorgan. They were would-be rather than real detectives, and had been working on a mere suspicion. It was correct, but they gave it up after one effort.

The want of unanimity of opinion between the first Mrs. Rose, Mr. Oates and their companions, did not surprise Dorgan. Some people remember faces and others do not.

Abe Benlow took Deep Duke's advice and is now leading an honest life; and he is all the happier because Sam Loonsby is "serving time" at Sing Sing, for offenses in New York.

Mrs. Rose, of Bangor, had her husband and her certificate, but as both were worthless, she went back to Maine and dropped out of sight, but her condition was improved by a generous gift from the grateful Professor Woodside.

Claudia is now happy as the wife of Ralph Hathaway, and the latter's mother regards the Woodside family highly. She deeply regrets the injustice she once did the professor, but he has no blame for her, and they are good friends.

Woodside is far happier than he ever expected to be. He sees his adored daughter blessed with all that makes life happy; he sees Philip settled down to practical effort; and, without a stain on the family name, he feels that the later years of his life are all that man could desire.

Deep Duke, the Silent Sleuth, has retired from detective work, a result greatly facilitated by a handsome present from the professor, in connection with the case which we have here traced in all its remarkable phases; but he has left behind him the reputation of one without a rival in the records of the great city in solving the mysteries of the deep-laid schemes of artful and desperate men.

THE END.

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- 132 Nemo, King of the Tramps.
- 159 Red Rudiger, the Archer.
- 174 The Phantom Knights.
- 187 The Death's Head Cuirassiers.
- 193 The Man in Red.
- 206 One Eye, the Cannoneer.
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- 230 The Flying Dutchman of 1880.
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- 237 Long-Haired Max; or, The Black League.
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- 263 Iron-Armed Abe, the Hunchback Destroyer.
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- 271 Stonefist, of Big Nugget Bend.
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- 169 Corporal Cannon, the Man of Forty Duels.
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- 262 Fighting Tom, the Terror of the Troughs.
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347 Denver Duke, the Man with "Sand."
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420 The Old River Sport; or, A Man of Honor.

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83 Gold Bullet Sport; or, Knights of the Overland.
243 The Pilgrim Sharp; or, The Soldier's Sweetheart.
304 Texas Jack, the Prairie Rattler.
319 Wild Bill, the Whirlwind of the West.
394 White Beaver, the Exile of the Platte.
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414 Red Renard, the Indian Detective.

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- 92 Buffalo Bill, the Buckskin King.
117 Dashing Dandy; or, The Hotspur of the Hills.
142 Captain Crimson, the Man of the Iron Face.
156 Velvet Face, the Border Bravo.
175 Wild Bill's Trump Card; or, The Indian Heiress.
188 The Phantom Mazeppa; or, The Hyena.

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- 28 Three-Fingered Jack, the Road-Agent.
30 Gospel George; or, Fiery Fred, the Outlaw.
40 The Long-Haired Pard.
45 Old Bull's-Eye, the Lightning Shot.
47 Pacific Pete, the Prince of the Revolver.
50 Jack Rabbit, the Prairie Sport.
64 Double-Sight, the Death Shot.
67 The Boy Jockey; or, Honesty vs. Crookedness.
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105 Dan Brown of Denver; or, The Detective.
119 Alabama Joe; or, The Yazoo Man-Hunters.
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302 Faro Saul, the Handsome Hercules.
317 Frank Lightfoot, the Miner Detective.
324 Old Forked Lightning, the Solitary.
331 Chispa Charley, the Gold Nugget Sport.
339 Spread Eagle Sam, the Hercules Hide Hunter.
345 Masked Mark, the Mounted Detective.
351 Nor' West Nick, the Border Detective.
355 Stormy Steve, the Mad Athlete.
360 Jumping Jerry, the Gamecock from Sundown.
367 A Royal Flush; or, Dan Brown's Big Game.
372 Captain Crisp, the Man with a Record.
379 Howling Jonathan, the Terror from Headwaters.
387 Dark Durg, the Ishmael of the Hills.
395 Deadly Aim, the Duke of Derringers.
403 The Nameless Sport.
409 Rob Roy Ranch; or, The Imps of Pan Handle.
416 Monte Jim, the Back Sheep of Bismarck.
426 The Ghost Detective; or, The Spy of the Secret Service.
433 Laughing Leo; or, Sam's Dandy Pard.

BY EDWARD WILLETT.

- 129 Mississippi Mose; or, a Strong Man's Sacrifice.
209 Buck Farley, the Bonanza Prince.
222 Bill the Blizzard; or, Red Jack's Crime.
248 Montana Nat, the Lion of Last Chance Camp.
274 Flush Fred, the Mississippi Sport.
289 Flush Fred's Full Hand.
298 Ligger Lem; or, Life in the Pine Woods.
308 Hemlock Hank, Tough and True.
315 Flush Fred's Double; or, The Squatters' League.
327 Terrapin Dick, the Wildwood Detective.
337 Old Gabe, the Mountain Tramp.
348 Dan Dillon, King of Crosscut.
368 The Canyon King; or, a Price on his Head.

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- 14 Thayendanagea, the Scourge; or, The War-Eagle.
16 The White Wizard; or, The Seminole Prophet.
18 The Sea Bandit; or, The Queen of the Isle.
23 The Red Warrior; or, The Comanche Lover.
61 Captain Seawolf, the Privateer.
111 The Smuggler Captain; or, The Skipper's Crime.
122 Saul Sabberday, the Idiot Spy.
270 Andros the Rover; or, The Pirate's Daughter.
361 Tombstone Dick, the Train Pilot.

BY WILLIAM H. MANNING.

- 279 The Gold Dragoon, or, The California Blood-hound.
297 Colorado Rube, the Strong Arm of Hotspur.
385 Will Dick Turpin, the Leadville Lion.
405 Old Baldy, the Brigadier of Buck Basin.
415 Hot Heart, the Detective Spy.
427 The Rivals of Montana Mill.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

- 27 The Spotter Detective; or, Girls of New York.
31 The New York Sharp; or, The Flash of Lightning.
33 Overland Kit; or, The Idyl of White Pine.
34 Rocky Mountain Rob, the California Outlaw.
35 Kentuck, the Sport; or, Dick Talbot of the Mines.
36 Injun Dick; or, The Death Shot of Shasta.
38 Velvet Hand; or, Injun Dick's Iron Grip.
41 Gold Dan; or, The White Savage of Salt Lake.
42 The California Detective; or, The Witches of N.Y.
49 The Wolf Demou; or, The Kanawha Queen.
56 The Indian Mazeppa; or, Madman of the Plains.
59 The Man from Texas; or, The Arkansas Outlaw.
63 The Winged Whale; or, The Red Rupert of Gulf.
72 The Phantom Hand; or, The 5th Avenue Heiress.
75 Gentleman George; or, Parlor, Prison and Street.
77 The Fresh of Frisco; or, The Heiress.
79 Joe Phenix, the Police Spy.
81 The Human Tiger; or, A Heart of Fire.
84 Hunted Down; or, The League of Three.
91 The Winning Oar; or, The Innkeeper's Daughter.
93 Captain Dick Talbot, King of the Road.
97 Bronze Jack, the California Thoroughbred.
101 The Man from New York.
107 Richard Talbot, of Cinnabar.
112 Joe Phenix, Private Detective.
130 Captain Volcano; or, The Man of Red Revolvers.
161 The Wolves of New York; or, Joe Phenix's Hunt.
173 California John, the Pacific Thoroughbred.
196 La Marmoset, the Detective Queen.
203 The Double Detective; or, The Midnight Mystery.
252 The Wall Street Blood; or, The Telegraph Girl.
320 The Genteel Spotter; or, The N. Y. Night Hawk.
349 Iron-Hearted Dick, the Gentleman Road-Agent.
354 Red Richard; or, The Crimson Cross Brand.
363 Crowningshield, the Sleuth; or, Pitiless as Death.
370 The Dusky Detective; or, Pursued to the End.
376 Black Beards; or, The Rio Grande High Horse.
381 The Gypsy Gentleman; or, Nick Fox, Detective.
384 Injun Dick, Detective; or, Tracked to New York.
391 Kate Scott, the Decoy Detective.
408 Doc Grip, the Vendetta of Death.
419 The Bat of the Battery; or, Joe Phenix, Detective.
428 The Lone Hand; or, The Red River Recreants.

BY COLONEL DELLE SARA.

- 53 Silver Sam; or, The Mystery of Deadwood City.
87 The Scarlet Captain; or, Prisoner of the Tower.
106 Shamus O'Brien, the Bold Boy of Glingal.

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- 1 A Hard Crowd; or, Gentleman Sam's Sister.
4 The Kidnapper; or, The Northwest Shanghai.
29 Tiger Dick, Faro King; or, The Cashier's Crime.
54 Always on Hand; or, The Foot-Hills Sport.
80 A Man of Nerve; or, Caliban the Dwarf.
114 The Gentleman from Pike.
171 Tiger Dick, the Man of the Iron Heart.
207 Old Hard Head; or, Whirlwind and his Maro.
251 Tiger Dick vs. Iron Despard.
280 Tiger Dick's Lone Hand.
299 Three of a Kind; or, Tiger Dick, Iron Despard and the Sportive Sport.
338 Jack Sands, the Boss of the Town.
359 Yellow Jack, the Mestizo.
380 Tiger Dick's Pledge; or, The Golden Serpent.
404 Silver Sid; or, A "Daisy" Bluff.
431 California Kit, the Always on Hand.

BY J. C. COWDRICK.

- 390 The Giant Cupid; or, Cibuta John's Jubilee.
422 Blue Grass Burt, the Gold Star Detective.

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- 398 Sleepless Eye, the Pacific Detective.
432 The Giant Horseman; or, Tracking the Red Cross Gang.

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